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RESOURCE TEACHERS AND MULTI-TIER SYSTEMS OF SUPPORTS: BLACK MALES'
SPECIAL EDUCATION IDENTIFICATION

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
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ABSTRACT

The disproportionality of students placed in special education programs continues to plague the education community, particularly Black male students. “For too many Black male students, learning difficulties or challenging behaviors come to be equated with disability, often without consideration of the way in which the environment of schools and classrooms contribute to student difficulties” (Jordan, 2016, p. 33). This study examined the lived experiences of resource teachers who lead Multi-tier Systems of Supports (MTSS) implementation in their schools. The study reviewed the extent to which their perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings drive their problem solving and decision-making regarding referrals to special education and specifically regarding Black male students. The study involved seven resource teachers ($N=7$) who are charged with leading the employment of MTSS in their schools. Data of semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed for the emergence of themes. The study resulted in three overarching themes, including (a) expected outcomes of implementation, (b) clear expectations for implementation, and (c) sufficient support and technical assistance. No subjects discussed the overidentification of Black males to special education. This study reveals the need for a district commitment to (a) allocate a resource solely responsible for MTSS implementation, (b) create a uniformed job description that outlines skills necessary for the resource teacher role and provide MTSS procedural guidelines to carry out the functions of that role, and (c) provide ongoing training and professional development for school leaders responsible for hiring staff who lead Multi-tier Systems of Support (MTSS) implementations in their schools.

To

My Mother

For being a strong, faithful, and dedicated mother who sacrificed so much so that I could have everything. You taught me that with hard work and perseverance anything is possible.

My Wife

For encouraging me throughout this entire journey and for supporting me even when it meant that things would be harder for you.

My Kids

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My Siblings

For motivating and believing in me and cheering me on throughout this journey

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Students of color have an extensive history of overrepresentation in special education programs. To illustrate this overrepresentation, Black students make up roughly 14% (Davis & U.S. Census Bureau, 2013) of the total population in the United States and approximately 17% of students enrolled in public schools in the State of Florida. However, approximately 26% of Black students, ages 6 to 21, receive services under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (IDEA, 2004) in the state. This data suggests that Florida schools must examine the root cause of the issues that may be affecting students' academic performance in school. The need to provide professional development on the effective use of Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) seems evident. Cook and Odom (2013) indicate that knowledge of evidence-based practices and interventions are often unavailable to those responsible for implementation. Less than adequate implementation of MTSS, coupled with the historical discrimination of Black male students, has contributed to disproportionality and overidentification of Black male students in special education programs. Black male students have an extensive history of being misidentified for special education (Cramer, 2015; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Bean (2013) affirmed assumptions postulating that the overidentification of Black students may in fact be an issue of misdiagnosis. Overidentification and misdiagnoses of Black male students pose a significant threat to social justice efforts and a daunting threat to the achievement of students through the provision of equitable practices within public education systems throughout the United States.

Statement of Problem

In special education, disproportionality persists at a national level and has been an issue for decades (Bal et al., 2014; Waitoller et al., 2010). Mandated by IDEA, the amended Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, states were charged with effecting change through the enforcement of policies and procedures aimed at reducing disproportionate representation of students with disabilities among diverse racial and ethnic groups. Wiley et al. (2013) defines disproportionate representation as a particular group's representation in special education differing significantly from what should be expected based on the proportion of the general student population represented by that group. As reported by the Office of Civil Rights Data Collection for the school year 2012–2013 (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015), the percentages of public school students with disabilities served under IDEA overall and by race/ethnicity were as follows: American Indian/Alaska Native, 1.4 %; Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.4 %; Hispanic, 23.0%; Black (non-Hispanic), 18.5 %; White (non-Hispanic), 51.3 %; and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 0.3%. In the state of Florida, the percentage of public school students with disabilities served under IDEA overall and by race/ethnicity during this same year was as follows: American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.4 %; Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.3 %; Hispanic, 28.4 %; Black (non-Hispanic), 26.0 %; White (non-Hispanic), 40.9 %; and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 0.1%. When comparing national data with Florida's data, disparities indicate reductions in participation among the American Indian/Alaska Native, (1.4% to 0.4%); Asian/Pacific Islander, (2.4% to 1.3%); White (non-Hispanic), (51.3% to 40.9%) and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, (2.4% to 1.3%) subgroups. The ratio of race to the overall distribution of students with disabilities was greater in Florida than in the U.S. Specifically, the

ratio for Hispanic (23% to 28.4%) and Black, non-Hispanic (18.5% to 26%) subgroups was higher in Florida than in the U.S. overall, with the Black subgroup experiencing the largest disparity.

To better understand why this paradigm of overidentification of Black male students for special education services still exists, it is essential to analyze the reasons for the problem and search for new, novel, and innovative ways to reduce disproportionality. Publicly funded education requires support, structures, procedures, and practices to ensure that every student is successful (Albrecht et al., 2012). Further, it has become critical that schools enact a systematic approach for educators to carry out this mission in a way that contributes to fulfillment of each student's potential, progress, and success in academic achievement.

With the adoption of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a school-wide system of support to improve the academic and behavioral outcomes for students has been mandated. ESSA identified this initiative as the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). MTSS serves as a framework for providing robust academic and behavior support for students. Within MTSS, a three-tiered continuation of supports has been developed to provide targeted instruction and interventions for students and are implemented to ensure progress for all students (ESSA, 2015; Horner et al, 2019; Horner et al., 2017; Lane et al., 2013; Nagro et al., 2019).

The Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) framework has been created as a foundation for inclusion and, when implemented with fidelity, could be successful in evaluating whether students, indeed, have a disability or whether they simply have unique learning needs (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Special education benefits students with identified disabilities because it provides students with an individualized education program (IEP) that targets specific needs and

ultimately provides supports designed to enable them to reach their full potential. For students who have different learning needs and do not have a disability, special education services have been shown to be inappropriate and can carry stigmatizing labels that negatively affect their self-esteem and quality of life (Bruce & Venkatesh, 2014). State-level data from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) corroborate these negative effects.

Table 1 outlines the number and percentage distribution of students (ages 14–21) served under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, who exited school, by exit reason, sex, race/ethnicity, age, and type of disability in 2014–15. In that year, 69.4% of students with disabilities graduated with a regular diploma; 17.8% of students with disabilities dropped out, considerably less than their non-disabled peers. When the Black subgroup was examined, only 62% graduated with a regular diploma. Furthermore, 21.8% of Black students with disabilities dropped out of school. Although the dropout rates are extremely low for students with disabilities, students with disabilities who are Black drop out at even higher rates.

Table 1

Number and percentage distribution of 14- through 21-year-old students served under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, who exited school, by exit reason, sex, race/ethnicity, age, and type of disability: 2014-15

2014-2015	Total	Graduated with regular diploma	Received alternative certificate\1\	Reached maximum age\2\	Dropped out\3\	Died	Transferred to regular education	Moved, known to be continuing
Total number...	395,139	274,240	43,663	5,259	70,475	1,502		
Percentage distribution of total	100.0	69.4	11.1	1.3	17.8	0.4	†	†
Number by sex...								
Male	256,709 (64.9)	175,824 (68.4)	27,675 (10.7)	3,414 (1.3)	48,766 (18.9)	1,030 (68.5)	37,508	107,611
Female	138,430 (35.0)	98,416 (71.0)	15,988 (11.5)	1,845 (1.3)	21,709 (15.6)	472 (31.5)	19,445	54,637
Number by race/ethnicity...								
White	199,133 (50.3)	147,869 (74.2)	18,623 (9.3)	2,524 (1.2)	29,379 (14.7)	738 (0.3)	32,736 (16.4)	75,783
Black	83,467 (21.1)	51,828 (62.0)	11,915 (14.2)	1,128 (1.3)	18,227 (21.8)	369 (0.4)	8,763 (10.4)	41,354
Hispanic	89,345 (22.6)	58,578 (65.5)	10,903 (12.2)	1,260 (1.4)	18,318 (20.5)	286 (0.3)	11,433 (12.7)	34,442
Asian	6,786 (1.7)	5,160 (76.0)	865 (12.7)	217 (3.1)	506 (7.4)	38 (0.5)	1,556 (22.9)	1,781
Pacific Islander	1,618 (0.4)	1,068 (66.0)	143 (8.8)	23 (1.4)	371 (22.9)	13 (0.8)	357 (22.0)	467
American Indian/Alaska Native	5,963 (1.5)	3,859 (64.7)	292 (4.8)	37 (0.6)	1,752 (29.3)	23 (0.3)	695 (11.6)	3,298

Further analysis indicates that the percentage of students aged 14–21 exiting special education who were served under IDEA and who graduated with a regular high school diploma was highest among Asian students (76%) and lowest among Black students (62%). Although Asian students (76%) graduated at a slightly higher percentage rate than White students (74.2%), the number of students graduated (5,160) was significantly lower than the number of White students (147,869). The percentage of students with disabilities exiting special education who received an alternative certificate was highest among Black students (14.2%) equating to 11, 915 students compared to the second highest subgroup, Asian students (12.7%) equating to only 865 students. Although the Hispanic subgroup (12.2) was the third highest when analyzing percentages, it was second highest in the total number of students receiving an alternative certificate.

In addition to regular diplomas and alternative certifications, the dropout rates are alarming. Although in 2014–2015 American Indian/Alaska Natives had the highest dropout percentages (29.3%), that represented 1,752 students compared with 21.8% of Black students dropping out, a total of 18, 227 students. Equally important, the Hispanic subgroup dropout rate accounted for 20.5 % of the students, the third highest percentage, but the total number of Hispanic students dropping out surpassed that of Black students, equaling 18,318 students. (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). Providing special education for students without disabilities, as is often done in the case of Black male students, is a disservice (Harry & Klingner, 2014).

Although research studies show that teacher judgment is a significant factor in the special education referral process, leading, in many cases, to subsequent confirmation of disability for students they refer, few studies have examined teachers' discursive constructions of student difference via actual referrals. (Jordan, 2016. p. 33)

These findings suggest a need to explore and eliminate disproportionality and overrepresentation of minorities, particularly Black male students, in special education programs.

Because the process of identifying students who need special education services is so complex and includes subjective input, a thorough understanding of the experiences and training of those involved is critical. Therefore, this study will explore and explain the lived experiences of resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools to better understand why Black male students continue to be overrepresented in special education.

Significance of the Problem

Educational agencies continue to discuss and coordinate best practices in serving students and their varied abilities and differences stemming from their diverse districts and communities. Embedded in these dialogues are assumptions about how to best respond and support these differences within the school context. Concerning Black male students, their differences or challenges are often associated with a disability, without considering how their school cultures and classrooms may contribute to these differences (Walter, 2002; Morgan, et al, 2017; Dever et al., 2016). Disproportionality of students placed in special education programs continues to plague the Black education community, particularly its males. According to Zhang, Katsiyannis et al. (2014), local education agencies (LEAs) are required to monitor and report on disproportionate representation of Black students in special education. When disproportionality is documented in the areas of identification, placement, or discipline, funds must be used to provide coordinated early intervening services (CEIS) that target the root cause (IDEA Data Center, 2015).

Black students are more likely to be labeled with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and are overrepresented in special education (Smith 2004; National Education Association 2008; Sullivan & Bal 2013; Miranda et al., 2014). Behavior problems and learning differences are often associated with having a disability, especially for Black male students (Young et al, 2010; Linton, 2015). Teacher judgment is a significant factor in the special education referral process, accounting for more than 80% of the students who are labeled with high-incidence disabilities and placed in special education (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services 2002a). Other research discoveries suggest that inappropriate approaches to school discipline, racial bias, and lack of cultural awareness lead to disproportionate amounts of suspensions for Black youth (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Losen et al., 2015; Rumberger & Losen, 2016; Skiba et al., 2011; Smith & Harper, 2015; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Compounding the issue of suspensions is the disparate number of Black American children and youth placed in special education programs who are suspended and expelled (Maydosz, 2014; Sullivan & Bal, 2013). These findings suggest a need for the exploration of resource teachers who are charged with providing supports to classroom teachers who are responsible for implementing preventative and evidenced-based practice.

Considering the statistics, it becomes important to understand and examine the ideologies, experiences, rationale, methods, and means teachers engage when concluding that students, specifically Black male students, should be referred into special education programs. Some have asserted that overrepresentation of Black students in special education stems from referrals from mainly White, middle-class female teachers. It has also been theorized that

increased rates of referrals are due to teachers' lack of understanding of Black culture (Skiba et al., 2008; Sullivan & Artiles, 2011; Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Wiley et al., 2013).

The MTSS framework evolved from what was previously known as Response to Intervention (RtI) and the Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports frameworks (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). The past three decades have witnessed significant changes to the way students have been referred and identified for special education services. Historically, schools used the intelligence quotient (IQ) discrepancy model to determine if students were eligible for special education services. Simply stated, the discrepancy model compared a student's intellectual ability with that of their academic progress in school. This model was enacted with the original passage of PL 94-142 in 1975 as a way for schools to determine students' eligibility for special education services. The use of the discrepancy model led to the disproportionate identification of students who were unfamiliar with the language and items of the assessments (Restori et al., 2009). In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized and the requirement to use the discrepancy model was changed. States were no longer required to use the discrepancy model as the method to determine eligibility for special education services. The reauthorization of the IDEA urged educators to now use scientific, researched-based interventions to identify students for special education services. As approval of the IQ discrepancy model among educators weakened, using RtI as the process for identifying students became popular in the 1980s (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Maki et al., 2015).

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) has origins pre-dating the arrival of RtI and is also a tiered approach designed to support students in all facets of the school experience, including the classroom. Misconceptions have surfaced with both RtI and PBIS. RtI

has been viewed as a process that focuses solely on academics in isolation from the student's behavior and social-emotional well-being, whereas PBIS has been perceived as a system of rewards earned by students for doing things that are intrinsically socially and culturally acceptable and not as a matter of direct instructional approaches consisting of teaching students behavioral expectations and providing corrective, restorative feedback when expectations are not met. RtI and PBIS are types of tiered supports that fall under the umbrella of MTSS. These two school-wide frameworks have been shown, when implemented in tandem, to have significant positive impacts on student achievement. One problem, however, is that they have been implemented separately in many schools. Consequently, increasing attention has been placed on the need for a single, integrated model that incorporates methods for academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs, such as the MTSS framework (Brown-Chidsey, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to ascertain if, in the lived experiences and perspectives of resource teachers responsible for leading multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) implementation in their schools, there is an awareness of an overrepresentation of Black males being referred for special education services. Specifically, this study investigated the extent to which resource teachers' perspectives, understandings, beliefs, and feelings influence their problem solving and decision-making regarding referrals to special education, particularly those of Black male students.

Research Question

1. How do resource teachers view their role and its impact on the MTSS process leading to special education programming for minority sub group populations?

Research Design

This qualitative study used a phenomenological research design to examine the perspectives of resource teachers through their lived experiences as they led implementation of MTSS in their schools. Data were acquired through semi-structured interviews. Using a purposive sampling procedure, the researcher selected resource teachers from a large urban district as participants in this study. Data collected aided in outlining and inferring the lived experiences of the selected resource teachers as they implemented MTSS in their schools.

The phenomenological method was used to examine lived experiences of resource teachers salient to the identification of practices, perceptions, and decisions leading to the referral and subsequent eligibility of Black male students for special education. Qualitative data were gathered to increase understanding of resource teachers' perceptions of practices they use for referrals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their respective schools. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a transcription service after obtaining permission from the participants. To obtain final confirmation of the data before analysis, Creswell and Miller's (2000) validity checking procedure was used to make certain that the data was representative of the participants' experiences. Data were collected and analyzed to

identify patterns or themes that emerged from the perceptions and lived experiences of the resource teachers. The data focused on the MTSS process and the overidentification of Black male students for special education. Understanding this phenomenon is meant to inform policy development and to improve educational practices essential in reducing overrepresentation of Black male students in special education.

Operational Definitions

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD): *Minority students, also referred as students of color, such as Latina/o, Black, and Asian students (Maxwell 2014).*

Disproportionality in Special Education: “Refers to differences in the identification and treatment of students within the system governed by state and federal rules and regulations and professionals’ interpretations thereof” (Sullivan, 2017, p. 279).

Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA): Enacted in 1975 and required all public schools receiving federal funds to provide equal access to education and one free meal a day to children with disabilities (Ford & Russo, 2016).

Elementary and Secondary Success Act of 1965: Emphasizing high standards and accountability, this statute funds primary and secondary education that authorizes professional development, instructional materials, and resources to support educational programs and increase parental involvement (Casalaspì, 2017).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): “The latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, signed into law Dec. 10, is in many ways a U-turn from its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, states get

significant leeway in a wide range of areas, with the U.S. Department of Education seeing its Hands-on role in accountability scaled back considerably” (ESSA, 2015).

Evidence-Based Practices: Practices that are research validated or possess empirical support (Shavelson & Towne, 2002).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): “An appropriate education may comprise education in regular classes, education in regular classes with the use of related aids and services, or special education and related services in separate classrooms for all or portions of the school day” (Yell & Bateman, 2019, p. 37)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): This is a legal document under the United States law that is developed for each child in the United States that needs special education services (Yell et al., 2020)

IQ Discrepancy Model: The IQ-achievement discrepancy model is the traditional method used to determine if a student has a learning disability and needs special education services. The discrepancy model is based on the concept of the normal curve. The discrepancy model assesses whether a substantial difference, or discrepancy, exists between a student's scores on an individualized test of general intelligence (IQ test, such as WISC-IV) and his or her scores obtained for one or more areas of academic achievement (e.g., Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test). The accepted criteria for identifying a student as having a learning disability using the IQ-achievement discrepancy is a difference of at least two standard deviations (30 points).

Lived Experiences: The confessions and self-revealing details research participants share about their beliefs and perceptions (Given, 2008 p. 139).

Misdiagnosis: Inaccurately identifying and evaluating children who are placed in special education (Dowding, 2017)

Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): Frameworks that emphasize a tiered continuum of evidence-based practices within the context of prevention science and implementation research (PBIS Implementation Blueprint, 2015).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): This law became the main law for K–12 education in the United States between 2002 and 2015 and held schools accountable for not showing achievement (Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Overrepresentation: Overrepresentation occurs when the percentage of minority students in special education programs exceeds the percentage of these students in the total student population (Zhang, 2002).

Resource teachers: Teachers whose role is to provide accountability, assessment and mentoring for teachers in an educational atmosphere that promotes student learning. Provide teacher support to ensure comprehensive instruction techniques with resources to assist students effectively in achieving grade-level objectives and goals. Support school progress monitoring programs.

Response to Intervention (RTI): A multi-tiered approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs (RTI Action Network, 2018).

Phenomenology: An approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS): “Framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students” (Crockett et al., 2019, p. 304).

Qualitative Research: “Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions on inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports details of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 2007).

School Expulsion: School expulsion refers to the removal of a student from school for a longer period of time and may involve decision making by school superintendents or school boards (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

School Suspension: School suspension refers to a disciplinary action involving the short-term removal of a student from school (Skiba et al., 2009).

Special Education: Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and instruction in physical education (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004).

Universal Design for Learning: A set of principles for curriculum development that gives all individuals equal opportunities to learn and provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone—not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs (Hehir et al, 2016).

Summary

Public schools face many challenges that overlap with social justice concerns. There is clear evidence that Black students are identified for and placed in special education more frequently than any other subgroup nationally and locally. Therefore, schools must remain vigilant in their quest to battle the national issue of overidentification of Black male students leading to disproportionate representation in special education. The intent of this study was to offer new insights into a field that is continuing to grapple with the issue of disproportionality by examining the lived experiences of resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools. Throughout the nation, Black students continue to be overidentified as having a disability, particularly Black male students. Similarly, the disparate representation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds represents a further challenge for the field of special education. Generally, CLD students, particularly Black students, have been overrepresented in high-incidence categories such as specific learning disability (SLD), intellectual disability (InD), and emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD), when compared to their White counterparts (Sullivan & Bal, 2013; United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2017b).

Table 2

Risk Ratios for Students 6 through 21 Years Served Under IDEA by Disability Category and Race/Ethnicity 2015

Disability	American/ Alaska Native	Asian	Black/African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	White	2 + Races/ Ethnicities
Autism	0.74	1.13	0.90	0.77	0.63	1.23	1.20
Deaf-blindness	1.26	0.84	0.79	0.87	0.81	1.22	1.27
Developmental delay	3.02	0.42	1.49	0.67	1.06	0.99	1.58
Emotional disturbance	1.27	0.19	1.80	0.58	0.64	1.07	1.51
Hearing impairment	1.01	1.18	0.91	1.27	1.38	0.84	0.94
Intellectual disability	1.19	0.51	1.96	0.91	0.84	0.77	0.87
Multiple disabilities	1.44	0.66	1.18	0.69	0.99	1.24	0.95
Orthopedic impairments	0.77	0.93	0.80	1.15	0.77	1.04	0.91
Other health impairment	1.05	0.28	1.23	0.62	0.63	1.37	1.21
Specific learning disability	1.44	0.31	1.33	1.25	0.91	0.80	0.96
Speech or language impairment	1.07	0.71	0.90	1.03	0.54	1.08	1.11
Traumatic brain injury	1.23	0.51	1.00	0.68	0.76	1.39	1.12
Visual impairment	1.20	0.88	0.98	0.88	0.87	1.12	1.03
All disabilities	1.25	0.48	1.25	0.96	0.77	0.98	1.08

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literature relevant to understanding the role of MTSS during the identification process, particularly in relation to the leaders of the MTSS process in schools. This literature review includes an abbreviated history of special education, including its policies and mandates, as they relate to the requirement for schools' implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI): namely, for the identification of at-risk students in need of special education programs and services. In addition to the Response to Intervention (RtI) model, the Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) model is described as a method to support the increasing number of students entering schools with consistent behavioral challenges. Finally, this review will also examine literature on disproportionate representation of Black male students in special education. In addition, the literature will describe the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as a model to implement both RtI and PBIS practices simultaneously to determine best approaches to support students who are not meeting grade-level academic expectations. This literature review provides the foundation for the need to examine the research question and serves to justify the selected research design.

History of Special Education Policy

Early Reform (1800-1860)

Today, many students receive special education services at the same schools and in the same classrooms as their non-disabled peers. This inclusionary practice has not been the norm for students throughout history. The need for special education services originated as early as the 1800's when reformers began to change the way that people with disabilities were treated. The early reformers sought to enact this change through training and educating others, altering

societal attitudes and norms, and establishing legal rights. Before the 1800s, people with disabilities were exploited, excluded, and executed, causing many to hide their family members with disabilities from the public. People with disabilities were viewed as less than human, and if one's ability to reason was compromised in any way, then those people were considered to be abnormal and strange. This viewpoint toward people with disabilities caused them to be shunned by society, and they were ultimately, isolated in hospitals and institutions. As the new century approached, advancements in medicine and improvements in economic opportunities motivated interest in people with disabilities. With this newfound schema, attitudes, training, education, and legislation to protect the disabled, along with special education, began to take root (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

Interest in educating people with disabilities began to spread as French philosophers began to study human nature, language development, and intellect. During this period, sensory disabilities were more evident than intellectual disabilities, so the first efforts to formally educate people with disabilities was among people who were deaf. Progress with the deaf generated optimism, resulting in additional efforts to educate people with intellectual disabilities. The Europeans became some of the first to attempt to educate people with disabilities. Jean Marc-Gaspard Itard attempted training a "wild" boy to be a productive member of society (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Although his attempts were less than successful, he established a systematic approach to training students with intellectual disabilities. In addition, one of Itard's students, Edouard Seguin, later authored the first book for the treatment and training of children with intellectual deficiencies. While the phenomenon of educating people with disabilities was gaining momentum, the Industrial Revolution began its own movement, pivoting people with

disabilities toward vocational rather than academic institutions to satisfy the economic benefits of an industrializing society. Some argue that special education did not emerge as an extension to general education; rather, it emerged as a byproduct and means to satisfy the curiosity of French philosophers, growing medical improvements, and the economic boom of the industrializing society (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

While reform was shaping in France and Europe, Dorothea Dix began raising awareness in the United States by appealing to the states' legislatures about deplorable housing conditions of people with intellectual disabilities as she visited jails and almshouses. Dix's determination and perseverance to ensure better treatment for the mentally ill was noted, and ultimately, the Massachusetts legislature began revising laws and appropriating funds to build proper institutions to minimize neglect and abuse among people with disabilities. As acceptance of disabilities grew, construction of schools, hospitals, and training facilities followed. Now convinced, others followed in Dix's footsteps to create opportunities for people with disabilities (Carey, 2009; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Advocates such as Gallaudet and Howe began to develop training methods for students with disabilities. They emphasized nurturing as an approach to help people with disabilities progress and become active participants in society. Consequently, early advocates championed the idea of keeping institutions small and family-like.

Progress to maintain the family-like atmosphere suffered as the overall population increased and with it, institutional populations. As the institutional population increased, there were associated increased costs, and resident labor began to be used to offset costs, mirroring the previous century's factory model or prison approach. To reduce costs, inexpensive buildings were used, and the focus shifted from the family-like environment to industrial efficiency and

cost effectiveness (Crissey, 1975; Winzer, 2009). These shifts in reform that dominated the early 19th century led to more significant changes as time progressed.

Stagnation and Regression (1860-1950)

The latter part of the 1800s brought about economic pressures, and society began to seek ways to manage, explain, and eliminate disabilities. The use of intelligence tests emerged as a means to isolate people with disabilities from society. Reduced funding and methods to control disabilities stagnated the progression of special education. As compulsory attendance laws were passed, students with disabilities were educated but were isolated by being placed in separate classes or schools to minimize their interaction with other children (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

Post 1950's Developments

As prosperity and optimism followed World War II, parent groups began to lobby for services for their children through legal battles. Parents formed advocacy groups that led to monumental court cases, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). The *Brown* case determined that the “separate but equal” clause in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) case had no place in public education and made clear that the laws that upheld segregation were unconstitutional and deprived minority students of equal educational opportunities (Obiakor & Utley, 2004).

As the civil rights movement was gaining public attention, advocacy groups continued to gain momentum and caught the attention of President John F. Kennedy, who in 1961, formed the President's Panel on Mental Retardation. The panel spent a full year researching, analyzing information, and proposing solutions. The panel presented over 90 recommendations to

Kennedy, which they believed would provide him with a full, comprehensive federal approach to improving the lives and education of people with intellectual disabilities. President Kennedy used the panel's recommendations as a plan to address those living with intellectual disabilities (Ruth, 1963).

In October of 1963, two pieces of legislation were aimed at improving the quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities. The first piece of legislation, the Maternal and Child Health and Mental Retardation Planning Amendment to the Social Security Act, incorporated many of the panel's recommendations and provided funding opportunities so states could enhance their programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The second piece of legislation provided more funding and focused more on the building of facilities to care for, and treat people with intellectual disabilities (U.S. Department of Health, 1968). In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA). This law provided funding for primary education and, as some advocacy groups would affirm, provided more access to public education for students with disabilities. Although these two acts provided access for students with disabilities, few students with disabilities benefitted.

1972-Present

As the *Brown* case established equal rights to education for all students, students with disabilities also benefitted. Although the *Brown* case argued against school segregation, it formed the basis for two subsequent cases that would continue to shape the history of special education, *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC, 1971)* and *Mills v. Board of Education (1972)*. In the *PARC* case, parents of students with mental retardation sued the State

of Pennsylvania argued that state statutes allowing the exemption of students with disabilities from receiving education were unconstitutional. This was the first case that established the right of every child to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (Lusk, 2015). The *Mills v. Board of Education* extended the services from PARC's rulings by requiring schools to provide services for students regardless of the districts' ability to pay. Therefore, in 1975, two federal laws were enacted to change this. Public Law 94-142, enacted in 1975 and otherwise known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), established the right to public education for all students (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2007). The EAHCA has been reauthorized and approved over time and today forms the basis for special education rights and services. In 1986, an amendment to the EAHCA extended FAPE to students ages 3–5 with disabilities and established early intervention programs (EIP) for infants and toddlers ages 0–2 with disabilities. In 1990, amendments were again added to the EAHCA. Renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), this new legislation provided many more improvements than the EHA, such as programs to promote research and technology and transition programs to support students after they leave high school (Coates, 1985).

Over time, these changes have increased access to education for students with disabilities. However, some practices, such as the prominent IQ Discrepancy Model, have been challenged and revised to address contemporary concerns. This core practice has been used as the primary means of determining eligibility for special education and, until recent times, has continued in use. The IQ discrepancy model will be discussed in the next section.

IQ Discrepancy Model

Historically, many schools and districts encouraged the use of the IQ discrepancy model to determine eligibility for special education services (Restori et al., 2009). Simply stated, the IQ discrepancy model was a process of comparing a child's intellectual ability with how the child performed or how much progress the child made in school. When a significant discrepancy between the two scores existed, the conclusion was that a serious underlying condition existed, making it difficult for the child to make adequate progress. The discrepancy model came into existence in 1975 with the passing of the IDEA and was implemented to identify students for special education. The adoption of this practice continued until the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, allowing states the flexibility to use the model of their choice. With the reauthorization, the requirement to use the discrepancy model as the sole means to qualify students for special education ended.

Many concerns with the discrepancy model had developed and continue today. School leaders and education professionals believed the discrepancy model should not be the sole indicator to determine if a child qualifies for special education services. Other concerns with the discrepancy model included inconsistencies in interpretations across states and districts as to what the term discrepancy meant. In other words, what one state considered a discrepancy and used as information to qualify a child for special education, another state, upon examining the same information, may use to determine the child ineligible for special education services. Educators also argued that the discrepancy model identified too late students who may have been in need of services. In essence, the IQ discrepancy model required students to fail over the course of several years. Subsequently, students were only considered for special education services well

into their educational career, which inadequate implementation of equitable practice rendered inadequate and insufficient to recover lost achievement. Simply, under the IQ discrepancy model, students were frequently positioned for failure rather than success because of missed opportunities for early intervention and support. Educators challenged its usefulness in identifying students' need for special education, given the drawbacks that had been described.

Another concern about the IQ discrepancy model was that it did not consider critical factors, such as cultural and linguistic differences, among certain subgroups of students. Cultural and linguistic differences may affect how students score on tests, perform on classroom tasks, or acclimate to certain educational environments. However, when these differences are not considered, true bias is introduced. These biases could lead to CLD students qualifying for special education, leading to more restrictive environments that could affect their learning negatively. Furthermore, qualifying students for special education who are just as capable as their peers creates greater stigma surrounding students' true capacity to achieve.

Perhaps the greatest concern that developed, as the IQ Discrepancy Model was used, was the increasing awareness of the disproportionate classification of minorities, particularly Black male students, in special education. Disproportionality came to be viewed as a national educational issue as well as a civil rights and social justice issue. Disproportionality will be discussed in the next section.

Disproportionality

Although changes were being made to improve student outcomes, Black students were more often being identified as needing special education as their peer groups. Disproportionality,

in special education, is generally defined as differences in treatments or outcomes by group membership. This definition encompasses both overrepresentation and underrepresentation in special education, but most learning, policy, and professional development has focused on overidentification of minority students as disabled (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2013; Waitoller et al., 2010). Disproportional representation of students placed in special education programs continues to be of concern in the education community. The percentage of groups in special education differs significantly from that of similar groups represented in the general education setting, as recognized by Gentry (2009). Bal et al. (2014) state that although disproportionality has been recognized as an issue for many years, it persists as a national problem. Minority students, especially Black students, tend to be eligible for and placed in special education more than White students. Black students are more likely to be placed in a more restrictive classroom setting, limiting their access to the general education curriculum. When this happens, Black students show fewer academic gains and stay in special education longer (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Some believe that categorizing and labeling students aids in the classification of groups in schools and differentiates the extent to which these groups have access to and can attain knowledge. Some believe that categorizing and labeling students promotes tracking groups of students while sanctioning unnecessary and unproductive classification. These practices have led to increased achievement gaps between groups based on racial makeup (Rocha & Hewes, 2009). Furthermore, placing students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds into special education at a higher rate than their White peers further expands educational and social inequities (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011).

Researchers have hypothesized several contributing factors to the phenomenon of

overrepresentation, including ineffective disciplinary practices, poverty, and poor instruction (Skiba et al., 2006). Black students' suspension and expulsion rates are significant issues relating to their educational plight. According to Lose et al. (2015), in every state in America, suspension rates are higher for Black students than for their peer groups. Aud et al. (2010) reported that in 2007 a higher number of Blacks had been retained at a grade level than other White, Hispanic, or Asian elementary/secondary students, and more Black students in grades 6–12 were suspended from school than students of any other race or ethnicity. Another factor worth consideration is that Black students are also referred for special education at a much higher rate than their peers (Skiba et al., 2008). Some longitudinal studies have shown students with disabilities progressively falling behind academically (Kohli et al., 2015). In fact, approximately 80% of CLD students read below grade level on reading comprehension tests used to measure reading achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). High rates of school dropout and post-school unemployment have also been identified (Affleck et al., 1990; Sullivan et al., 2013).

Because of the biases that were becoming more apparent while the IQ Discrepancy Model was in use, in conjunction with the problematic issues associated with disproportionality, new models were emerging. These alternatives will be discussed in the next sections.

Response to Intervention/Instruction (RtI)

In the 1970's, the RtI framework began as a new way for researchers to identify students with disabilities as an alternative to the IQ discrepancy model that compared students' achievement scores and IQ scores to determine eligibility for special education services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). However, not until the reauthorization of the IDEA was it further encouraged.

With the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, RtI was included as a way for schools to identify students with learning disabilities. The RtI process begins with the teacher assessing each student's individual needs in the class. The assessment results help the RtI team determine which students needed instructional interventions. Schools use this process to identify students who are at risk for failure and in need of immediate, intensive academic support. Through the use of this process, critical identification of targeted interventions for students can be determined and implemented. For example, interventions can be part of a class-wide approach where the teacher organizes students into groups based on different skill levels or learning styles and tailors the intervention to their needs (RtI Action Network, 2018).

As a replacement for the IQ Discrepancy Model, an added feature of RTI is scheduled progress monitoring. Progress monitoring involves frequently assessing students to determine the effectiveness of the interventions being provided. During the intervention, the student's teacher or another member of the RtI team uses a research-based assessment tool to measure students' skills. The tool may be used weekly or every other week to measure progress continuously. These progress monitoring probes are usually quick, taking only a few minutes to complete. After each assessment probe, progress is usually plotted on a graph, making it easy to interpret whether progress is being made and/or the need for additional support.

The RtI framework uses a three-tiered model, described as a pyramid, where instruction and interventions are designed to target instructional academic deficiencies while using learning rate over time and performance levels to continue to make instructional decisions (Nicholas & Antonio, 2012). If students continue to show a lack of response to instruction or inadequate learning rates, compared with peers, more intense support is provided and students are moved

into the next, more intensive tier of support. In tier 1, all students receive high quality instruction and support at their current grade level and are assessed on how they respond to the core curriculum. Students who do not respond successfully at this level of instruction are moved to the tier 2 level. Within tier 2, instruction and intervention are based on evidenced-based practices that have demonstrated success, and supplemental resources are provided in a small group setting that allows for more intensive instruction. If students do not respond to tier 2 supports, students receive more intense individualized intervention and instruction at a tier 3 level. At the tier 3 level, supports provided are more frequent and intense and are more individualized. Only a small number of students should require tier 3 supports or interventions. These supports or interventions are received one on one or in a very small group usually consisting of students who need the same intervention at the same level of intensity. Although tiers of support are delineated throughout the pyramid, the model is designed to be flexible and accommodating to changes that students may exhibit in response to each intervention and instruction. Most students spend most of the day in the general classroom setting. If a student is receiving all tiers of supports and interventions are being implemented with fidelity, but the student does not make adequate progress, that student will likely be referred for an evaluation for special education services. RtI, then, is a comprehensive framework for supporting the progress of all students rather than simply a means of identifying students with disabilities.

RtI provided an alternative to the IQ discrepancy model when academic performance was limited. When behavior was a concern, PBIS was considered as an alternative that stressed prevention over punishment. PBIS was designed when the reauthorization of IDEA of 1997 created funding for a National Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

(National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2011). PBIS will be discussed in the next section.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)

Like RtI, PBIS is also a tiered framework of support systems that increase in intensity as the needs of the students increase (Sugai et al., 2000). PBIS, though, is specifically focused on providing support to improve behavior in class and at school.

Like RtI, PBIS is a proactive approach that schools and districts use to promote safety and to teach positive behavior. Its main objective is to teach students positive behavior strategies in the same way that teachers teach reading, math, science, and other academic disciplines. In schools that implement PBIS, all students are taught and learn about behavior. During instruction, students learn what appropriate behavior is and can use the common language to discuss it when necessary. When successful, students know what is expected of them behaviorally regardless of their location on campus. Some of the guiding principles of PBIS are as follows: (a) students learn expected behaviors for specific situations, (b) students learn behavior expectations through direct explicit instruction and are provided opportunities for practice and are given feedback, (c) early intervention prevents more serious behavior problems, (d) schools need a bank of supports to support the varying needs of their student population, (e) instruction should be researched-based; behavior data should be tracked consistently, (f) schools utilize the data to make informed decisions about interventions, and (g) school staff is consistent in providing praise when students display appropriate behaviors to minimize negative incidents (Lauren & Scott, 2016). When implemented with fidelity, PBIS can lead to better student

behavior, fewer referrals and suspensions, decreased bullying incidents, and increased academic performance.

The PBIS framework also has three tiers that focus on those students who do not respond successfully to the school's general rules and procedures. The aim of the first tier is to incorporate behavior instruction to all students that will reinforce positive behavior and prevent inappropriate behavior. Within tier 1, students learn basic behavior expectations such as being respectful and kind. School staff regularly praise students for model behavior. Tier 1 implementation may provide incentives such as small rewards, prizes, or tokens to recognize when students are meeting desired expectations. When core behavior instruction or tier 1 has been implemented with fidelity and has proven ineffective for some students, tier 2 interventions and supports are engaged. Tier 2 interventions are supplemental and do not replace tier 1. Tier 2 interventions provide another layer of support for students who continue to struggle with their behavior. If tiers 1 and 2 are implemented with fidelity and the student remains unresponsive, then more intensive, individualized support and interventions will be implemented. These interventions are evidenced based in nature. For example, at this tier, students may receive instruction in their specific area of need so they can build capacity in how they respond in certain situations. Tier 3 of the framework focuses more on the individual needs of the student who continues to display consistent behavioral issues. These behaviors typically will require intensive interventions that are developed from the data collected in tiers 1 and 2 and then are tailored to meet the student's needs and deficits. The three tiers of intervention focus on targeted behaviors for the development of specific interventions and supports to help students achieve success in the general education classroom.

To successfully implement the PBIS framework, some key components must be in place. These components are a strong leadership team, whole staff buy-in and engagement, school and district support, and continuous development of coaches (Handler et al., 2007). Strong leadership teams that understand PBIS are instrumental in ensuring that the vision of PBIS is clearly articulated and executed. The instructional staff must be willing to do what is necessary to make sure students are being supported and practices are being implemented that look closely at students' responses to interventions, their behaviors, and their needs.

RTI and PBIS have continued as frameworks that schools use to support and improve students' academic and behavioral performances. The two frameworks were joined when, on December 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), an amended version of the ESEA that had been enacted decades earlier. ESSA and its subsequent influence will be discussed in the next section.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The adoption of ESSA has increased emphasis on supporting struggling students along with students with disabilities in schools. ESSA replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB had become renowned for emphasizing the need to address the academic performances of subgroups of students including those with disabilities. NCLB included stronger accountability, increased local control, additional options for parents, and the use of proven teaching methods for all students. When, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB, emphasis on personalized learning increased. ESSA endorsed Universal Design for Learning

(UDL), emphasizing the need for multiple means of representing learning of action and expression and of engagement (Hehir et al., 2016; CAST, 2011). Overall, emphasis has increased on improving access and the success rate in the general education setting for students with disabilities in a way that is supportive to their learning needs and increases their participation. By minimizing barriers to the instruction of the curriculum in general education, improving instruction and assessment has followed (Wehmeyer, 2006).

In addition to these significant changes, ESSA expanded access to Multi-tiered Systems of support (MTSS) for all schools. Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) such as Response to Intervention and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports have been advocated as methods to better address the needs of students from minority backgrounds and students in high-poverty schools (Hosp & Madyun, 2007). ESSA also provided states and local education agencies the flexibility they need to build a robust MTSS framework that they believe will meet the needs of all students they serve, resulting in some demonstrated success (Slavin et al., 2011). The critical features of MTSS relative to the current study will be explained in the next section.

Multi-tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) merged two separate frameworks, RTI and PBIS, to meet the needs of the whole child. MTSS is a tiered framework that many schools and districts use to provide targeted support to struggling students. Greenwood and Kim (2012) posits that tiered systems are proactive and designed and remediate students of diverse ability levels. Within an MTSS framework, all children are initially assessed via universal screening with the intention to address the whole child focusing on students' behavioral, academic, social,

and emotional needs. Unlike the IQ discrepancy model, the goal of MTSS is to intervene early so that students who are behind can catch up to their peers and students who struggle with behavior can eventually work toward self-regulation. Tiered supports are a major part of the MTSS process. Once students are screened and identified as on target for academic and behavior expectations or in need of more intensive instruction in a given area, the tiers of instruction or intervention are assigned. All students are then assigned to different tiers of instruction or intervention targeted to meet their specific needs. All students are provided tier 1 instruction, usually in the general classroom setting, in which all students are provided core instruction, usually at the same intensity, with minimal support and scaffolds. Research shows that 80% of students usually have an adequate response to tier 1 instruction (Mellard et al., 2010). At the tier 2 level, small group interventions are provided to some students who have demonstrated a need for more support in specific areas, such as vocabulary development or phonemic awareness. The scheduling of these interventions is critical as they need not replace the time for students to receive tier instruction. Students who receive tier 2 interventions also receive tier 1 core instruction, and their progress is regularly monitored. However, even with tier 1 and tier 2 instruction and interventions, some students still do not make adequate progress. These students will move to the most intensive level of support and continue with tier 1 core instruction. The tier 2 small groups are broken into smaller groups with more narrowly focused intervention sessions.

Receiving support within the MTSS structure does not guarantee student success. Students from impoverished backgrounds may continue to struggle in school despite MTSS tier-1- and tier-2-level instruction. With the proper level of intensity and supports, some students show signs of making adequate progress. For students who continue to struggle, tier-3 instruction

must be provided often with intensive, individualized interventions. Students who make progress with tier 3 interventions are understood as having no disability and should not be referred for special education. Once students are identified as making progress, they are not referred for further evaluation of their educational and psychological needs, and the school leadership team codifies around the belief that they are receiving appropriate instructional services. Students who show a lack of a response to intensive, individualized intervention, based on progress-monitoring data, may show a need for special education services. At this juncture, fidelity across three domains— instruction, progress monitoring and implementation throughout each tier—is critical.

Successful implementation of MTSS requires schools to use a continuum of systematic and coordinated, evidence-based practices targeted at students’ varying needs (Harn et al., 2011; Horner et al., 2010). This systematic approach has reduced barriers and led to sustained continuous improvement. However, this approach has been unevenly implemented. Nevertheless, MTSS shows promise over earlier methods that have been found to contribute to inflated referrals of minority students, particularly Black male students, to special education. A more thorough understanding of the MTSS process and its elements is needed, and this study will examine one aspect: the lived experiences of resource teachers who lead MTSS at their respective schools.

Summary

In response to legislation and litigation, various models such as MTSS, RtI, and PBIS have been developed to address student performance and student behavior. However, poor Black students remain misunderstood, and students’ home environments and school culture continue to

be misaligned. Academic values and behavioral expectations may even conflict with socio-cultural norms. (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

The revisions to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), required schools to use approaches that are proactive and targeted to students' individual needs. ESSA identified MTSS as a means to address the academic and behavioral needs of all students. MTSS is intended to provide the structure necessary to minimize misconceptions regarding all students: more specifically, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The MTSS framework uses a multi-tiered approach to providing support and interventions to all students at three different levels, realizing that students respond differently to core instruction and behavioral expectations and may need additional support to succeed. The MTSS process is now enacted to combine conversations about students' academics and behavior into the same problem-solving process to determine the next action steps for the individual child. This approach recognizes that both academics and behavior affect each other (Algozzine et al., 2011). Some use RtI and PBIS interchangeably when referring to MTSS; RtI and PBIS are both tiered supports that fall under the umbrella of MTSS. These two school-wide structures are tried and proven and have shown positive impact on student achievement both academically and behaviorally. Although both RtI and PBIS are effective, the issue has been that they have been implemented in isolation. Therefore, the need for an integrated model that processes academic, behavioral, and social and emotional needs into a single multi-tiered system of support is critical for the success of all students who struggle in school. This is particularly critical for Black male

students who often face both explicit and implicit bias and discrimination in our schools, as evidenced by the disproportionate overrepresentation in special education (McIntosh et al., 2010).

Every school must provide high-quality education, supports, intervention, and enrichment opportunities to ensure that every child reaches their potential. Urban schools often face high percentages of English language learners and students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, as well as crime-ridden neighborhoods. Yet in the face of these challenges, many urban schools provide a high-quality education and produce high-achieving students (Osher & Fleischman, 2005). For all students to realize their potential, schools must be very systematic and strategic in how they align resources and supports to carry out this mission. The MTSS model gives schools the framework to apply problem-solving processes to both academic and behavioral needs of students. Further, the model is critical in determining students' need for special education services. When implemented with fidelity, and when academic and behavioral conversations are integrated during the problem-solving processes, MTSS can be used to decrease the amount of inappropriate referrals for special education, thus decreasing disproportionality of Black male students receiving special education services (McIntosh et al., 2014).

In summary, this literature review has provided the historical narrative requisite to understanding the history, policies, and mandates of special education as they have informed and shaped requirements for schools' implementation of RtI, PBIS, and, ultimately, MTSS. In light of the current socio-cultural climate of America and its evolution over time, the accurate identification of at-risk students in need of special education programs and services is more critical than ever. In addition, the literature described the use of MTSS as a model to implement

both RtI and PBIS practices simultaneously to determine appropriate support for Black male students who are not meeting grade-level academic expectations. Key aspects of previous research findings have been integrated to inform the research related to the disproportionate identification of Black male students in special education. This literature review was used to guide the research in examining one aspect of this complex phenomenon: the lived experiences of resource teachers who oversee and coordinate MTSS implementation at the school level.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach was used for this study (Creswell, 2013; Odman & Kerdeman, 1999) to focus on resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation at their respective schools. The chapter provides sections on the rationale for research, the overview of the research design, the population and sample from which the subjects were chosen, and the procedures that include how the data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability were completed. Possible limitations of the study are presented. This chapter will close with a brief summary.

Overrepresentation of Black male students in special education programs has been recognized as a national phenomenon. While researchers have identified and begun to investigate this problem, Black male students remain disproportionately represented in special education programs. The existence of disproportionality and its effects in schools, districts, and states, as well as nationally, suggests that thorough examination of this issue is imperative to understanding and eliminating the barriers and threats to social justice. Further, disproportionality exposes the need to explore school procedures and practices to identify areas of success or areas that need improvement to reduce and eliminate this phenomenon.

As reported by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) child count data, American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and multiracial children and adolescents are at highest risk for special education identification (USDOE 2017a, 2017b) (See Table 2). According to placement data, Black children are 5.5 times more likely to be placed in a correctional or

detention facility. Additionally, nearly half of the school districts in the United States have substantial problems with disproportionate student identification for special education regarding CLD students (USDOE, 2017b). This indicates a need to explore the role that resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools play in the identification of Black students for special education.

Toward this end, qualitative research is well aligned. Qualitative research helps the researcher to obtain a deep, rich understanding of the lived experience of an individual's behavior (Mutakha, 2006). Qualitative research also allows the researcher to apply their investigative and subjectivity skills during the fact-finding process. Phenomenology is considered a "participant-oriented" approach that allows research participants to share the essences of their lived experiences without any influence (Alase, 2017). Moreover, researchers using the phenomenology approach are usually invested or interested in the phenomenon they are studying (Moustakas, 1994). For these reasons, qualitative research was selected to examine the lived experiences of resource teachers who implement MTSS.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to ascertain if, in the lived experiences and perspectives of resource teachers responsible for leading multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) implementation in their schools, there is an awareness of an overrepresentation of Black males being referred for special education services. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 7 participants ($N=7$) and analyzed the transcribed interview data for themes, patterns, and relevant units of meaning. Data from this study produced results that will

help explain the phenomenon of disproportionality by examining the perspective of resource teachers who lead MTSS. The study will inform the field of educational leadership as well as articulate the need for a more defined job description for educators leading the MTSS.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

How do resource teachers view their role and its impact on the MTSS process leading to special education programming for minority sub group populations?

Research Design

The design of this research follows a qualitative, phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach involves developing descriptions of the essences of experiences of the research participants. (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994). With phenomenological studies, there is not an expectation to test a hypothesis, predict results, or generalize findings (Moustakas, 1994). Instead, phenomenological methods capture and categorize the totality of lived experiences of a single person or group of individuals in the most comprehensive manner (Giorgi, 1997). Further, phenomenological methods are central to interpretive research and include descriptive and interpretive methodological approaches (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014).

The phenomenological approach brought rigor and depth of understanding to the broad impact of disproportionality. To identify and examine the beliefs and practices that affect the

overrepresentation of Black male students in special education, resource teachers whose primary responsibility was leading MTSS implementation in their schools were selected as the population for the study. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. This interview data permitted the researcher to speak on behalf of the participants by using his or her own quotes, examples, and experiences in order to accurately portray their lived experiences. Therefore, through the use of phenomenological methodology, the multidimensional facets (e.g., their “voice, processes, emotions, motivations, values, attitudes, beliefs, judgments, microcultures, identities, life course patterns, etc.”) (Saldana, 2013, p. 38) of the descriptions were analyzed. This research design served to provide the researcher with a deeper, comprehensive, and rigorous understanding of the complex phenomenon being studied (Khan, 2014).

Rationale for Research Design

The intention of this research was to gather the perspectives of research participants about the phenomenon of disproportionality of Black male students in special education. Hycner (1999) states that “the phenomenon dictates the method including the type of participants” (p. 156). To identify the primary participants, purposive sampling was used. Welman and Kruger (1999) emphasize that a purposive sample is the most useful non-probability sampling for identifying participants. The semi-structured interviews, conducted with the selected resource teachers, have provided a rich, detailed description of their roles and responsibilities and has given the researcher the opportunity to better understand the MTSS process related to the disproportionate representation of Black male students in special education (Creswell, 2013).

Interviews are one of the most commonly used methods of obtaining qualitative data. Interviews are used to understand the experiences people have and the meanings they make from them (Creswell, 2013). The interview questions selected for this study were developed to determine the essence of the participants' lived experiences (see Appendix D). Use of a qualitative research method and phenomenological premise for this study informed the researcher's use of purposive sampling.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of resource teachers in a large urban district in the southeastern United States who lead the implementation of MTSS in their schools. Resource teachers provide overall support in the areas of accountability, assessment, and coaching for teachers, in alignment with the school's mission and improvement plan. Resource teachers are also charged with providing teacher support and guidance to ensure implementation of best instructional practices for leading students to success and high achievement across grade levels. Resource teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and be certified or certification-eligible by the state's department of education to provide instruction in schools. Some of the key job duties and responsibilities include but are not limited to (a) mentoring teachers and acting as a classroom facilitator to assess best learning practices for teachers to use in the classroom, (b) participating in a cooperative effort with faculty and staff to plan, implement and evaluate school wide curriculum programs, (c) participating in the state's required workshops and other trainings, (d) maintains contact with teachers, parents and

administrators to coordinate the use of classroom instruction, (e) maintaining timely and accurate information responsibilities, and (f) performing other duties as assigned by the principal.

Participants

Creswell (2013) describes a population as people who share the characteristics of an identified group. For the purposes of this study, a purposive sampling of individuals and school sites was conducted in a large urban district to identify participants who meet the criteria.

The large district serves approximately 207,000 students at 191 schools. The demographic makeup of the students in the school district consists of 41% Hispanic, 27% White, 25% Black, 5% Asian, and 2% multicultural. The district consists of 125 elementary, 37 middle, five K–8, 20 high, and 4 exceptional schools. Of the approximately 25,000 employees, 14,000 are instructional. This study used purposive criterion sampling to select participants employed as resource teachers in this large urban district. The selected participants met the following criteria: (a) they are currently designated to lead MTSS implementation for their schools, (b) they have at least three years of classroom teaching experience; (c) have at least one year of experience as resource teacher charged with leading MTSS implementation in an elementary school, and (d) were currently working at a school that had at least 15 Black male students enrolled at the school.

The district's research, accountability, and grants department identified 10 schools whose resource teachers met the criteria that was established. The list of schools was given to the researcher who contacted the principal of each school where the selected resource teachers were assigned. The participants selected for the study were confirmed by their principals as

individuals who lead MTSS implementation for their school and would have direct experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). After meeting selection criteria, resource teachers were contacted via telephone to inform them of the intention to include them in the study. Participants were provided with the full scope of the research in writing to give them the chance to make an informed decision regarding participation. Morse (2000) posits that sample size typically falls within the range of 6–10 participants for a phenomenological study. Selecting a purposive sample intentionally ensures a group of people who can best inform the researcher about the concern being explored (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenology is designed to be less structured and more open-ended to encourage the participants to share details regarding their experiences. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide a thorough understanding of the participants' common experiences. With the support of a focus group consisting of elementary principals, a series of open-ended questions were used to develop an understanding of resource teachers' perspectives and lived experiences to address the research question. The questions were developed to allow participants to be comfortable with the researcher and to share their experiences with in-depth, explicit insight into the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Open-ended questions allowed participants to answer questions in detail, and the semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to establish interview questions that were directly aligned to the research question, yet flexible enough for clarification by way of probing or follow-up (Creswell, 2013). Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step process was used for analyzing the interview data. Sanders (2003) provided guidance for novice researchers using the established seven-step process phenomenological process.

Procedures

The research design for this study was framed using procedures recommended for implementing a phenomenological study by experts in the field, including the procedures proposed by Creswell (2013). Before any data collection was begun, the research proposal was submitted to the University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct research. Once approval was received from the university, submission for IRB approval to the urban district was sought and also obtained. This study posed minimal risk to the participants, schools, or the school district, and informed consent was obtained from all resource teachers who elected to participate in the study. All participants were provided with a copy of the informed consent and reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time.

The research participants' confidentiality was protected through various means. These measures were submitted to UCF's IRB and the district's IRB and were approved and accepted. Digital audio recordings were stored and password protected and were only accessible to the researcher. To further protect the participants' identities, each participant was assigned a numeric code. In accordance with IRB procedures, all data has been retained in a password-protected file and will be retained for 5 years, after which the data will be destroyed.

Once approval was received from the university and the urban district, interviews were scheduled individually at a mutually agreed upon location other than the participant's school campus. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather large volumes of in-depth data quickly. The interviews provided a plethora of information, including but not limited to information on the school site, organizational policies and procedures, referral process, and participants'

perspectives. Specifically, interview questions explored participants' perspectives relating to personal and professional experiences, beliefs, feelings, opinions and assumptions underlying their problem solving and decision-making regarding referrals to special education. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data were collected over a 6-month period and analyzed for themes.

Seven participants ($N=7$) were selected for interviews. Each participant participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher at a location of the participant's choosing. To ensure compliance with IRB requirements, each participant was provided with an informed consent before an interview. With permission from each participant, the interview was recorded. Immediately following the interview, recordings were downloaded to the researcher's computer and sent digitally to a secured transcription service to be transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2013). After the semi-structured interview, each participant was provided with a copy of the verbatim transcript as means of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure that the transcript was an accurate account and that it captured their intended meaning. Interviews conducted for this study ranged in length from 12 minutes to 50 minutes ($M=25$).

Validity and Reliability

In this study, the phenomenological research design contributes toward validity. Tufford (2012) defines bracketing as a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the "potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (p.1). In phenomenological research, the researcher is considered the instrument for data collection and data analysis (Chenail, 2011; Creswell, 2013). The subjectivity of the researcher and possible

impact on the validity and reliability of the study requires deep consideration. Before beginning any data collection, the researcher participated in the bracketing process. Sorsa et al. (2015) emphasize the reality of researcher bias and the necessity for researchers to consider and engage in processes that allow them to set their personal knowledge, experiences, and beliefs aside to accurately describe the lived experiences of the participants interviewed.

The bracketing interview was conducted by a colleague who was also a graduate student at the same university as the researcher. The bracketing interviewer was chosen because he was pursuing a doctorate in the area of curriculum and instruction and had completed the bracketing process themselves, and had experience using qualitative research processes. Although the researcher participated in a bracketing interview at the beginning of the study, the bracketing process continued throughout the duration of the data collection process as conducted by the researcher. Participants received copies of the transcriptions for member checking and validation that their responses were accurately reflected.

Additional bracketing procedures were employed. These procedures included a narrative of positionality, an audit trail of data, and a peer-debriefer. The narrative of positionality allows the researcher to become aware of the stance in relation to the study's social and political context. The narrative outlines what the researcher understands about the research process, their beliefs about the phenomena, and any other biases going into the study. This narrative of positionality was written before going into the study, as suggested by Berger (2013) and D'Silva et al. (2016). The bracketing interview was conducted by a colleague who was also a graduate student at the same university as the researcher. The interviewer was chosen because they were

pursuing a doctorate degree in curriculum and instruction and had not only completed the bracketing process but also had experience using qualitative research processes.

The third bracketing procedure was the audit trail (Connelly, 2016). An audit trail is a qualitative research strategy to establish the firmness of the research study's findings. Audit trails ensure that the findings are based on the participants' narratives. For this study, the researcher kept an electronic audit trail that included the following items: (a) the study instrumentation, (b) the original audio recordings from interviews with participants, (c) verbatim descriptions of the interviews, and (d) a file with the selected verbatim statements, interpretations of those statements by the researcher, and the assigned meaning of those statements. Using this audit trail allowed the researcher to refer back to any of the original data as necessary.

This study also used peer debriefing to establish validity as the final bracketing procedure. Peer debriefing contributes added validity and enhanced credibility to the study by examining the researcher's transcripts and methodology. Upon examination by a peer-debriefer, unbiased feedback was provided highlighting potential interference with objective examination of the phenomenon due to the researcher's positionality. The peer-debriefer was given digital copies of the verbatim transcripts from each participant as well as the document used for data analysis.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher's positionality statement shows that the researcher was aware of positionality before, during, and after the research process. The positionality statement bracketing procedure is usually written at the beginning of the study, before any data is collected

(Creswell, 2013; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Additionally, the statement of positionality will provide the reader with transparent information about the researcher's perspective (Creswell, 2013; D'Silva et al., 2016). Temple and Young (2004) believed that the researcher's position in the world impacts their viewpoint; therefore, the possibility that positionality can affect research outcomes and interpretations is inevitable. The researcher's positionality, including professional and educational experiences relating to the phenomenon being studied, is discussed.

Positionality Statement of the Researcher

I began my professional career in a large urban school district. I taught physical education at two elementary schools that were considered Title One schools, and one of the schools was an exceptional education feeder school. I then moved to another large urban district where I continued to teach physical education at another Title One school. During this time, I became a National Board-Certified teacher and began mentoring new teachers to my school and the profession alike. After nine years of teaching, mentoring and coaching teachers at my school, I was promoted into a resource role as an instructional coach/curriculum resource teacher. After one year in that role, I was promoted to assistant principal in a suburban elementary school. My primary duties included but were not limited to (a) facilitating extensive professional development for the instructional staff, (b) facilitating data meetings to support and provide guidance for instructional staff to disaggregate data and adjust curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of the diverse student population, (c) selecting, coaching, and retaining highly qualified teachers, and (d) creating, monitoring, and maintaining the school's master schedule.

Transitioning from the role of resource teacher to that of assistant principal was not without challenges. One of my major projects involved opening the school's first self-contained Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (EBD) classroom. This project motivated me to deepen my knowledge about compliance and legal implications of exceptional student education. I had to know the inner workings of special education protocols specific to the onset of a student's academic struggles, to identification of a disability, to placement in a more restrictive setting; and placement in the most restrictive setting process was fluid for students identified as EBD. Appropriate staffing in this department necessitated developing a heightened sensitivity to the needs of the students that I was charged to serve. With that, I visited other schools using the self-contained model of EBD classrooms. I quickly noticed that the demographic of these classrooms was primarily male and minority. During this time, my curiosity about the phenomenon of disproportionality and membership of certain classrooms, specifically as it related to minority males, was piqued.

Currently, I am a doctoral candidate at a large public university. I have focused my research on the lived experiences of resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools. I currently hold a specialist degree in educational leadership, a master's and a bachelor's degree in physical education, and a National Board Certification in physical education. In addition to being a doctoral candidate, I am an elementary school principal serving in a large urban district. I currently work in a large urban elementary school that serves more than 700 students with over 80 staff members.

My philosophy is that each and every student is unique and brings special gifts to the world. I believe it is my duty to believe in them and help them discover those special gifts. I

deeply believe that my duty is to assist students in discovering who they are so that they can be confident in expressing their own opinions and ideas. Further, I hold true to the belief that it is my duty to help mold and shape young citizens into people who respect, accept, and embrace the differences between us in our world, as our differences are what makes us special. These differences should be acknowledged, celebrated, and embraced. Moreover, I believe that schools are vehicles for preparing students as valuable members of society. Therefore, the creation of collaborative relationships among the school, parents, and community are necessary and should be nurtured and sustained. I believe that all adults have the responsibility to promote positive interactions with children and to use their influence to equip children with the knowledge and skills to effect positive change in their world. Deep collaborative efforts are essential to supporting students and contributing to the assurance that none slip through the cracks.

Finally, I am responsible for this study, including the literature review, justification for this study, research question, methodology, data instrumentation, and data collection. Moreover, I am responsible for the data analysis, conclusions, and implications for field and future research. The need for this study is substantiated through the identification of gaps in literature and the current shifts in practice related to the disproportionate representation of Black male students in special education programs.

Summary

This chapter provided the research methodology that focused this study. Additionally, this chapter provided the rationale for the research design, data collection procedures, and protocols for the analysis for this phenomenological study. This study provided the reader with

an explanation of the bracketing process and the steps the researcher implemented before collecting data, during the data collection, and during the validity checks. The next chapter will analyze and explain the results from the semi-structured interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to ascertain if, in the lived experiences and perspectives of resource teachers responsible for leading multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) implementation in their schools, there is an awareness of an overrepresentation of Black males being referred for special education services. Specifically, this study investigated the extent to which resource teachers' perspectives, understandings, beliefs, and feelings influence their problem solving and decision-making regarding referrals to special education, particularly those of Black male students.

This chapter explains the results of the phenomenological interviews and provides corresponding analysis to the research question:

How do resource teachers view their role and its impact on the MTSS process leading to special education programming for minority sub group populations?

Seven (N=7) resource teachers were interviewed, and profiles for each are presented in the data. From the data analysis, three themes arose: (a) expected outcomes of implementation, (b) clear expectations for implementation, and (c) sufficient support and technical assistance. In addition, a total of nine sub-themes emerged from the three overarching themes. Each of the sub-themes is presented.

This chapter is presented in two sections. The first section contains participant profiles. Use of the profiles give the reader a better understanding of the background of each participant. To protect the confidentiality of the study participants, their names have been changed, but the

content is accurate. Following the participants' description, organization of this chapter follows this design: each section presents an overarching theme accompanied by its corresponding sub-theme(s). To answer the research question, the researcher used a detailed, thick, rich description with participants' words and phrases throughout.

Table 3:

Participant Demographics

Participant	Teaching Experience	Degree	Race	Gender	Previous Roles	Current Role
1	16 years	Master's in educational leadership	White	Female	5th grade teacher, 3rd grade teacher, dean	MTSS resource teacher/ instructional coach
2	29 years		White	Female		MTSS resource teacher
3	20 years		White	Female	Instructional coach, reading coach, did a stint as assistant principal, staffing specialist	MTSS resource teacher
4	8 years	Master's in elementary education	Black	Female	Speech and language pathologist, kindergarten teacher, first grade teacher, and second grade teacher	MTSS resource teacher/ instructional coach
5	25 years	Master's in exceptional education	White	Female	V.E. teacher, kindergarten through fifth grade teacher, reading coach	MTSS resource teacher/ staffing specialist
6			White	Female	Self-contained classroom K to 5, pre-K teacher, second grade teacher, ESE resource teacher	MTSS resource teacher/ staffing specialist
7	14 years	Master's in public health education	Black	Female	Permanent sub, classroom teacher	MTSS resource teacher

Participant Profiles

Participants

Overall, there were seven participants, all of whom serve in the role of MTSS resource in elementary schools throughout the large, urban district. Taken together, the participants have a total of 112 years of teaching experience ($M = 19$). Four of the seven hold master's degrees. Five of the participants are White, and two of the participants are Black. All seven of the participants were female. The participants held a variety of roles in the past, including experience as a permanent substitute teacher, a teacher in general education and/or special education, as a coach, as a dean, staffing specialist, and as an assistant principal. The participants willingly participated in the research study, provided their consent, and responded to the questions in the qualitative interviews. A summary of each individual participant's background follows.

Participant 1

Participant 1 is a White female who has been in education for 16 years. Thirteen years of her experience was spent as a fifth-grade teacher. After teaching fifth grade, participant 1 became a third-grade teacher. After spending time as a third-grade teacher, she moved out of the classroom into the role of a Dean. Currently, she serves as an instructional coach responsible for leading MTSS implementation in her school. Participant 1 obtained her bachelor's degree in elementary education and her master's degree in educational leadership. Additionally, participant 1 has completed an Advanced Coaching Academy certification through the large urban school district.

Participant 1 believes that her teaching background prepared her for the role as a resource teacher who leads MTSS implementation. Drawing from her background, she provided insight regarding significant elements of effective MTSS implementation:

I think the biggest thing is probably the differentiating instruction. I was really big in that in my classroom. I feel like small groups is the key. I guess I'm a big believer in it, so I feel like being strong in that in the classroom and knowing how to analyze the data and do it in my own classroom, I was able to filter it over to the whole school.

Participant 2

Participant 2 is a White female who has worked for the large urban school district for 29 years and 4 months. In addition to working within the same district, she has also provided instruction at the same school since starting her career. While the physical location of her school remained constant, she noted various iterations in its name since she began working there. In her school she has provided direct instruction as a first- and third-grade teacher and support to teachers and students in kindergarten through fifth grades as the school's reading resource teacher. Currently, she serves as the MTSS resource teacher charged with leading MTSS for her school.

Participant 2 believes that being a reading resource teacher helped her into the role of MTSS because it taught her a lot about struggling learners:

I feel like I've been given the gift of MTSS because I'm like their shareholder. I'm like their gatekeeper, and I make sure nobody in our building falls through the cracks.

Reading Resource led me to learn on K-5, what they need specifically for their

intervention, how to help them best. Now, in my role, I could do that through helping my teachers help their students.

Participant 3

Participant 3 is a White female who has been in the teaching profession for about 20 years. Of her 20 years of service, twelve were dedicated to teaching in the elementary classroom setting. After that, she spent 4 years as an instructional coach and before that as a third-grade classroom teacher. Following her second position as a third-grade teacher, she became an instructional coach, a reading coach, an assistant principal, and a staffing specialist. Now, she leads her school in the implementation of MTSS as a resource teacher.

Participant 3 believes that her reading background and classroom teacher experience are very significant experiences that have prepared her for her role leading MTSS implementation in her school. Participant 3 believes that teaching experience is critical to effective MTSS implementation:

It is crucial to have someone leading MTSS who's been a classroom teacher. I think there is a perspective on that you don't want to miss. They are down in the trenches, dealing, making decisions, minute by minute. Per instruction on who they target and how they target the skills for the kids. I think that's been very important. I think my reading background has also been important. I also have reading endorsements, so I know what's needed in a child's development and been able to pinpoint what's lacking when something is lacking.

Participant 4

Participant 4 is a Black female who has been in education for eight years. She started as a speech and language therapist working in the private sector of the school system and with middle school students. She later transitioned into teaching. She felt that teaching was more of a fit as she was not happy working solely as a therapist. She has taught kindergarten, first, and second grade. She was guided into her role as a resource teacher who leads MTSS by a former principal. At the encouragement of her former principal, she applied for resource positions, which led her to serving under a new principal. Subsequently, she interviewed for an instructional coaching position in math and reading MTSS for grades kindergarten through second. Currently, she is the resource teacher who leads MTSS implementation for her entire school.

Participant 4 believes that her primary teaching experiences has best prepared her for the role as a resource teacher who leads MTSS implementation:

I've been in several different types of schools that have a majority of certain populations, and what I've gathered is, it doesn't matter what population you're in, you're going to have students that are in the MTSS process and that all kids are the same. They all have a want or will to learn, you just have to tap into their potential. So I think that teaching, especially in the primary grades has prepared me for that perspective of it. That all children want to learn, it's not something that some kids do; no, they all do, you just have to tap into what they want to learn about.”

Participant 5

Participant 5 is a White female who has an undergraduate degree in general education. She also was provided with an opportunity after finishing her undergraduate degree to get her master's in exceptional education because of the teacher shortage in that area. Upon completing her master's degree, she started teaching in 1994 and has been with the same district since. Since then she has been a varying exceptionalities (V.E.) teacher, kindergarten through fifth-grade teacher, reading resource teacher, staffing specialist, and now a resource teacher who leads MTSS implementation for her school.

Participant 5 believes her work with parents and having a son with a specific learning disability have prepared her for the role as a resource teacher who leads MTSS implementation for her school:

“Meeting with the parents, explaining the process, to me that's the hardest thing, is getting them to understand the process of everything. Before MTSS, it was kind of just sign here, we're going to evaluate your child and then and see if they qualify. So, I think and actually I'm on both sides of the table, my own son has learning disability, so its... I have personal experiences that I can help parents relate to, but yet teaching and just hearing what the teachers have to say, is maybe their frustrations during the school year, with the student can help me get the parents to understand why we're in here, why we're talking about their child, and we've just... It's all what's best for kids but that's just the years and years of being in the system. It didn't always start off that way, so.”

Participant 6

Participant 6 is a White female currently serving in the role of staffing specialist and MTSS resource teacher at her elementary school. She participated in a dual-degree program where she spent her junior and senior year participating in internships. She was able to observe many different placements during those times. Professionally, she began her career in a self-contained special education classroom teaching grades K through five. Subsequently, she transitioned into teaching pre-kindergarten for seven years. From pre-kindergarten, she taught second grade. She added that she accumulated much of her early teaching experience in the state of Georgia. Upon moving to Florida, she continued teaching second grade. Later, she transitioned to an exceptional education resource pullout teacher role until she moved into the resource teacher role for MTSS and ESE.

Participant 6 attributes her time in the self-contained classroom as the most significant experience related to preparing her for the role as a resource teacher who leads MTSS implementation in her school:

I've seen a lot of different learning styles, and I've seen, really, a lot of how kids pick up things and how they don't, and different tricks and things that sometimes you just can't teach those and you have to experience them, so I think being in the self-contained classroom, I picked up a lot of ideas of how some of those kids with special needs learn, and then in pre-K, I feel like that really equipped me with the strategies for teaching phonetics rules and breaking things down into really small chunks, so the preschool half, I think, really helps me when I work with them in reading.

Participant 7

Participant 7 is a Black female who started teaching in 2005. Having no initial interest in education, she began her career in public health in marketing before relocating to Florida. In 2006, after she relocated, she began serving in education as a permanent substitute. Since that time, she began substitute teaching at an elementary school and has been teaching as a professional educator at the same school for the past 11 years.

Participant 7 believes that her upbringing in church, being a pastor's child, and having the determination to seek knowledge has prepared her for the role as a resource teacher who leads implementation in her school:

“When I started in school, [even] now as a teacher, I always enjoyed learning myself and so, I'm a communicator and I'm a collaborator. I'm going to go and ask, Okay, if you did something better than I did, what did you do? I have always been the type of person to seek out someone who has done it better than I have. In the classroom, and I think that's what made the principal notice me, was if my students were struggling, I'm going to that classroom down the hall to see, Okay, what did you do in your class that your students are getting it and mine are not?”

Data Analysis

Participant interviews ranged in length from 12 to 50 minutes with a combined average of 25 minutes for the interviews. Participant interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to extrapolate developing themes and corresponding subthemes. In an effort to ensure all seven steps of Colaizzi's process were followed (Colaizzi, 1978), an Excel spread sheet was

created for each participant consisting of six columns. The first four columns were assigned to steps two through five of the data analysis procedures identified by Colaizzi (1978): (1) the researcher read each transcript to attain a general sense of the content, (2) significant statements were extracted and recorded on a spreadsheet, (3) meanings were then formulated, (4) meanings were sorted into units of general meaning; and (5) meanings were then ultimately formulated into themes.

To begin the analysis, the researcher listened to the audio recordings while simultaneously reading the verbatim transcripts to ensure accuracy. During the initial stage, the researcher focused on the context of the data and the participant responses. This allowed for the researcher to obtain an in-depth sense of the interview as a whole before dissecting the data into individual parts (Creswell, 2013). Then, verbatim statements that were considered significant were extracted from the transcripts and were placed in the first column of the Excel spreadsheet. The verbatim transcripts were used not only to preserve the integrity of the transcript but also to frame the statements accurately for the peer-debriefer (Creswell, 2013). After significant statements were added to the first column, the researcher reviewed each statement, determined meaning, and then added the description to Column B on the Excel document. This step required the researcher to review the significant statements for words, phrases, and sentences that spoke to the lived experience of that participant. The researcher continued this process until all statements in Column A had a corresponding meaning in Column B. Afterward, the researcher reviewed significant phrases and meanings, and those that were similar in nature were grouped and organized in Column C. This grouping of descriptions allowed the researcher to classify the descriptions by assigning those themes and to work toward the emergence of overall themes.

The five steps were repeated for the remaining participants. Once all five steps were completed for each of the participants, the entire Excel spreadsheet was sent to the peer-debriefer. The peer-debriefer was provided verbatim transcripts and a copy of the entire Excel document that included verbatim statements, meanings, and clusters. The peer-debriefer noted their agreement or disagreement in Column E. Any disagreements were accompanied by a note on the reason why they disagreed. If there were any disagreements, the researcher reviewed and made a final determination in Column F. All disagreements were reconciled before moving on to Colaizzi's Step 6 in the seven-step process.

Step 6 of Colaizzi's process involves the researcher integrating the themes into an exhaustive description. The essential structure of the phenomenon is, then, conveyed. The final step of Colaizzi's method (7) involved returning the results to the participants for the member-checking procedures. After interviews were conducted, all participants received a copy of their verbatim transcripts for their review (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Additionally, participants were invited and encouraged to provide feedback, edit, and add anything they deemed appropriate (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

After a complete analysis of the transcripts, significant statements, units of relevant meaning, and descriptions of the phenomena, three main emergent themes were identified: (a) expected outcomes of implementation; (b) clear expectations for implementation; and (c) sufficient support and technical assistance.

Results

The study results are presented to address one research question. The presentation of the data is used as evidence to support the themes and subthemes that emerged. Throughout the analysis, direct quotes from the research participants regarding their lived experiences are used. This method of presentation allows participants to express their own words and voice in the results, which therefore strengthens the credibility of the data analysis and conclusions.

The use of thick description, which includes the participants' quotes, allows the reader to understand and consider the entire essence of the experience. The use of quotes and phrases adds additional validity of the expressed feelings and emotions of the participants and ensures that the researcher has presented this in a reliable manner (Cope, 2014).

Research Question

This phenomenological research study was driven by the research question, "How do resource teachers view their role and its impact on the MTSS process leading to special education programming for minority sub group populations?" The group of participants felt their past experiences have been a preparatory requisite to their role as a resource teacher and effective leaders in MTSS implementation in their schools. However, results indicate a lack of awareness by participants of factors impacting disproportionality of Black male students in special education.

Theme One: Expected Outcomes of Implementation

All participants in this study met the participant criterion of being charged with leading MTSS implementation in their schools. This role was verified through the selection process and confirmed by their principals. Data from this study indicated that the role of the resource teacher who oversees MTSS implementation in a school is tedious and requires a demanding time commitment.

Participant 1 explained the MTSS implementation in the school:

Yes. So basically, what we do in the beginning of the year is when I take the FSA scores and i-Ready data, I have data meetings. We analyze the data, and we put the students into tiers, obviously, Tier 1, 2, and 3. I know all of them get Tier 1, but then we decide from there. I first decide, as a grade level, what we're going to be focusing on in Tier 2. So, for example, in third, fourth, and fifth [grades], it's more of reviewing the standards that maybe they were weak in on the common assessments or based on i-Ready. We use mostly i-Ready for our data and common assessments. So that's usually third, fourth, and fifth. K-2, what we usually do as a team is, again, we take the i-Ready scores, and then I kind of use the phonics continuum. And I use that to make sure the kids are following along with that. And then we build our Tier 2 groups based on that. And we also have, obviously, our enrichment groups. Then from there, I usually take the lowest 5% of the grade level. In this school, because there's such a high need for Tier 3, if they're already staffed in ESE, they just go to ESE and Language Services. I know that usually in Tier 3 that doesn't mean they can't get that additional, it's just then my groups would be too big. So, basically, at this school, I take my Tier 3, which is anywhere from four to six, seven

students. And K–2, usually its phonemic awareness. Again, I use the phonics continuum to help me. And then, three–five [grades], we review the week's standards using common assessments and stuff like that. And then we do that every nine weeks. We look at everything and see what changes we need to make. Teachers are allowed to make changes to Tier 2 whenever they need to if the data supports it.

Participant 2 gave more of a condensed version of a similar process:

Okay, well I hope that we're true to the process here. Every kid goes through MTSS in our building, whether you're Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3. All interventions are in place for Tier 2, but I'm really involved in mostly the Tier 3 piece. As the MTSS Coach, I'm very involved with the students on my radar, monitoring their data, holding meetings as needed, whether it's every four to six weeks, six to eight weeks, helping determine next steps for them, consent for them, and we're very true to the process here. We meet regularly with these kids. Their parents come in; they know exactly how they're struggling. I know what interventions are in place. I monitor them, make sure they're occurring and take notes regularly on these kids.

Participant 3 defined MTSS as a proactive, early intervention approach. She describes MTSS in this way:

Okay. At our school it is a cycle; and it continues. It's not just a start and an end. So, we starting in kindergarten, our first group that comes in usually has some kind of pretesting over the summer or at the beginning of the year. We try to use multiple measures to determine kids who have some gaps that need to be filled, and that's where the MTSS process comes in. We use resources and people and materials as they're available to

divide among the kids who need skills addressed. We try to address those skills; we try to measure how well that's working and then come back around and continue or move on to something else. And we have students who at the end of kindergarten either they're really ready for first grade, or they're not. And so, we continue to make decisions for those kids based on what we think the next steps should be.

Participant 3 added additional information about MTSS and its purpose in closing achievement gaps:

If during the MTSS process . . . it's meant to close gaps. Sometimes though, to meet their needs you need more than just intervention time. You might need extra people; you might need to find out more; so you might need to have them evaluated for a program. In some cases, with parents as partners you can speak on retaining them. That's usually . . . we look at that in either kindergarten or first grade as lower grade as possible if we're going to do that. But that's also hand in hand with asking ourselves, “what are we going to do next year differently than we're doing right now?” Because it does you no good to repeat a grade and do the very same thing. You have to ask yourself, “What can I do differently to meet their needs?”

Participant 4 described MTSS in her school in this way:

So primarily what I like to do is if we start the year off fresh, [with] no MTSS data, we'll do some beginning of the year assessment. I-ready is one of the main ones that we use. If the scores are off, being that you have a 4th grader who bombed the phonics section, we'll have the teacher administer the core survey to get a better reading and usually that will tell whether or not they really need phonics support, and if that's not the case, if it's

fine, if I-ready was fine we'll look at what category within I-Ready's reading section, or math that their having deficits in. So, you have a fifth grader who is working in reading comprehension at a third-grade level, they would be in tier three for reading comprehension. And you'd gather about six weeks' worth of data before we meet. We'll discuss it, we'll talk about strategies to implement, what small group plans you want to implement, are you pulling them for that extra 30 minutes with the tier three? And go from there. Set a next meeting date, and if there's no growth, then we bring in the school psych. We pull the cam, we look at everything to see if we should continue in tier three or move on to the next process, which would be testing. Or getting a consent for testing.

When Participant 5 was asked to explain MTSS implementation in her school, she stated:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, here at [school name omitted] we have, we identify the students each year, it kind of . . . When we first started, when I first came here, they didn't have a very strong MTSS process, so it kind of just started with just a data, but that time we weren't [utilizing] i-Ready, so with whatever data, clash of data that the teachers had. But now, each year, we end the year with looking at i-Ready data in the form of the assessments that the teachers have conducted over the year, and then we identify those two factors, and then we decide who needs that tier three intervention, and then when the scores come in over the summer, we add that third factor and then that's how we get our groups for the beginning of the school year. So, we try to start usually by Labor Day. So, we usually have two days before school starts with those three factors and then we identify our groups. However, there's also been those kids that come in from other schools, so the kids that come into our school, we're always constantly looking at what

they come with, to make sure that is there any, are they in that lowest 25%, do we need to rearrange some groups for them, but usually we start off with our own kids and get that started, and then, monthly as we meet, we meet every month, we'll revise and look at that again to see who needs to be rearranged in the system.

When Participant 7 was asked to explain what MTSS looks like in her school she said,

Yes. I have an open-door policy. Our teachers know that they can just come and talk, so they come to me and they are discussing whatever issue they are having with the children. If they're struggling in the classroom, what can I do? We have that initial conversation, the teacher and I, "What are you doing? What are you using for your resources, are you doing small group first of all, and are you meeting with the kids?" If you're not doing that, then okay, we need to have another conversation. We have that conversation, it's not a punitive conversation. This is a Las Vegas conversation, "Come and let's talk. What are you comfortable with, what are you not comfortable with? What do you need support with, do you need me to come in and model an instruction for you, what do you see that you need?" We'll have that conversation after we'll looking at what the teacher is doing, then we'll look at what the student is doing. We have all of this conversation first because we can't just look at what the kid is not getting, what are you providing first? We look at what she's providing and then if we look at it and we see that, "Okay, this is a whole meal here, you're providing what you need to provide." Then we'll look at, "Okay, what is it that's hindering the child then?" After we've addressed the teacher's teaching, then we'll look at the students and then we'll look at diagnostic testing, we'll look at i-Ready Diagnostic, we'll look at Star, we'll look at what the standards, what

is requiring. I would do a [cumulative file] search, I will look at the background history of this student. Did the student struggle from kindergarten up until this point? What was the struggle? Did the student do homework? You see my folder here, it's full of everything. When a teacher come into my office, I'll pull out a folder and we started talking. I'll put the kid's name and we'll start talking and I'll do a Cum [cumulative file] search. I'll get all of this background and history on the student's academics and then we'll target a skill. Okay, "Based on the diagnostic, based on what you see, do you agree with the diagnostic, do you agree that this kid has phonics issues in the third grade? Do you agree with that? What's the reading fluency of the student? Can they decode unfamiliar words? Do you believe this?" And sometimes they're like, "Yes, I see the student struggling," or sometimes they'll say, "No, the student can read fluently. I don't know what happened here." Then I'll allow the teacher to decide what the target is going to be because I can't just look at data because it doesn't always correlate. Then once we've decided on what the focus is going to be, then the teacher, they would decide what the instruction is going to look like. Okay, "You're going to meet with that student in small group, how many students are going to be in that group? How often are you going to meet with this student?" and so, we'll get all of that done. "What resource are you going to use? Are you going to use I-Ready resources? Do you have FCRR, do you have Stein?" I think it's Steinberg. "There are other resources out there, what are you going to use?" Then we'll decide the resource. We'll decide what it look like in the resource and then we're going to decide how often . . . when we're going to come back and have the conversation. We usually have instruction, about four weeks of instruction. They will

come back and have a conversation, the teacher and I. Now we involve the parent in this, so the initial . . . Once we get this initial diagnostic, our conversation, after the teacher and I have a conversation then we'll involve the parent. The parent will come in and we'll talk to the parent. We'll ask the parent, "Do you agree? What do you see at home when you're reading with your child? Do you see the same thing?" And we'll all come to an agreement. Sometimes the parents know, sometimes they don't because they don't read with the kids and they don't know the homework. We'll get everyone involved. Teacher go ahead and do her intervention. Me, I'll go in sometimes and look, see what's happening to make sure it's happening and then we'll come back and have a conversation after four weeks, the parent involved at that point also. From the initial deciding what we're going to do all the way through the parent is involved. The parent will come to our meetings, I'll take the meeting notes, and we'll talk about what's happened, or the progress of the child, or lack thereof. Then we'll decide if the intervention is going well, we're going to keep going with it for at least two more weeks. If it's going well for the four weeks, we'll keep going for about two more weeks. If the kid has mastered that standard or that focus, we're going to just be done with it and go back to whatever we need to do for tier one. If the student is struggling, then we'll decide. "Is the group too large, are you not meeting with the student enough? Are you giving him or her too many questions, or too many sight words or too many words? Do we need to back down on that? What do we need to do?" We'll look as a team with mom involved and decide what we're going to do. We'll give it one more round but we won't go as long. We'll give like three more weeks because by now we have almost a nine-weeks of intervention and we

don't want it to be where we're just struggling along. After that we go back and we meet again. If the student is still struggling and struggling just across the board, then I'll talk to the parent and tell them, Hey, we're going to get some other people involved here so that we can see where we're headed. I will then call the school psychologist, I will get our speech-language pathologist and we'll have a conversation. We'll schedule a meeting with the parent, all of us come to the table and we'll decide. We'll look at some exclusionary factors, we'll look at our tier three, what we're going to add to it and then we'll decide with the parent if we're going to look at psychoeducation evaluation or maybe sometimes it's just a language eval. The kid is not understanding what you're asking him. It's not that they're learning disabled and sometimes we look and see if the kid is just curriculum impaired and not learning disabled because it's easy to look as, The kid has a learning disability.” Well, this day and age they're probably curriculum impaired versus learning disabled because the expectation is so much greater than what the kids are used to, so we'll go through that process.”

Theme One, Sub-theme One: Accountability

The participants fully described the MTSS process and procedures used in their respective schools. However, several shared frustrations with some of the participants and team members they encountered in their experiences. Some of the participants expressed feelings of being overwhelmed with the adoption and implementation of a fully integrated MTSS model, as evidenced in the description by Participant 2:

It's mostly getting them onboard and modeling the process by helping them find time and materials and then the outcome, because a lot of people get frustrated with the process because it does take so long. Then they say, "Why am I doing all of this if the child's not being retained or the child's not being tested?" But look at the gains that child has made. Do we really need to look at those other avenues? Maybe not. It does get frustrating for them and getting them, especially the way we do it here, because we do it true to fidelity here.

Participant 3's description was similar when she described the behaviors of some of her teachers:

There's the feeling somebody's discomfort with something they've never tried before. So even if they've never done it this way, so not very comfortable trying it. There's the impression of adding something extra to someone's plate, that they already feel like they have a full load. And then you say but we also need this. That can be a challenge as well. And part of it too they feel as though when students get older, students need to take responsibility for their own learning and so in some cases they feel like it's a motivation problem or something like that. Or behavior in some cases, where a student's motivation and behavior was different they would be trying better. Therefore, they wouldn't need as much intervention. I would say those have been the pieces that go with that, that you kind of have to work with.

Participant 4 described her frustrations with the lack of buy-in, initiative, responsibility, and accountability:

"[I would explain to teachers,] you need to look at your data, you beginning of the year data and see whose is one or two grade levels below and email me and let me know. But

that was not happening, so I was doing that myself. I would email the teachers, like “Hey, this student is performing two grade levels below in reading comprehension. He needs to move to tier three. Start taking data.” Unfortunately, I had to do that because I felt like it wouldn't have gotten done if I didn't do that. But again, I know that some teachers would have done it regardless, and some teachers because they were new to the career, didn't know or didn't understand the importance of it. I felt like I had to push it, explain how I found that data and what you need to do. Moving forward, I want to try to change that because I definitely want to keep looking but I want the teachers to be a little bit more self-sufficient in identifying the students in their class that need more support. I shouldn't be able to do it. You should know your students.”

Participant 7 shared her challenges with a teacher when she described a situation when there was lack of follow through:

“I have one student that we were going through the problem-solving process with. We went through identifying a skill that the focus was going to be on, we had the parent involved. We went through all those steps and [only] to find out the teacher wasn't doing the intervention. When the teacher is giving me data, when we're looking at data to graph the data, not only do they have to send me the resource used, “Okay, this data point is from this.” I'm like, “Okay, you know what, I'm going to come in, in the classroom and I will work with the kid.” I go sit down with the kid and this is how I find out. We're working, we're working doing different flash cards, different games just making it fun and he was like, “I like this when you're meeting with me and I can get these words.” I

look at the kid and I'm like, 'Well, isn't your teacher meeting with you?' 'No, we meet on Fridays and she just gives me a test.' I'm like, 'Okay, this is not happening.'

Theme One, Sub-theme 2: Appropriate Level of Support

Implementing the MTSS process with fidelity requires that intervention and instruction be delivered to all students at varying intensities or at varied frequencies based on students' needs. This needs-based approach has been designed to ensure that the school resources are aligned to the students' needs at the appropriate levels to increase the likelihood that adequate progress is made. Participant 1 explained her approach and rationale for focusing on a particular subgroup when she said: "I usually take the lowest 5% of the grade level in this school because there's such a high need for Tier 3, if they're already staffed in ESE, they just go to ESE and Language Services. I know that usually in Tier 3 that doesn't mean they can't get that additional, it's just then my groups would be too big." She later offered the following insights when discussing the non-academic needs of her students and layering additional supports:

"When I'm meeting with my Tier 3 kids, I have the guidance counselor involved. Because a lot of times if they're Tier 3, and if I see it's something else going on ... For example, I've had homeless situations or a lot of absences, and in the lot of absences it's because something was going on at home or something like that. Then, I have to have my guidance counselor try to work on that first, because if that's not worked on then it's not going to help the academics. So that's how I handle those kinds of things."

Participant 3 articulated how much easier it is to align academic support for primary students when she explained: "it's easier to arrange intervention sometimes for primary grade levels,

partly because their skills are very apparent, when kids are learning to read; you can tell when a child doesn't know multi syllabic words, or they have trouble with blends, or they don't know their letter names and sounds. It's a little easier for those teachers to pick apart what they need to address.” (Participant 3, personal communication, May 31, 2019). She later explained her thoughts further about appropriate levels of support for ESE students at her school and her school’s justification to parents:

My first year in this position at this school when I came here they were a pullout ESE program. And they were pulling out kids during the intervention block. And that was the way they had done it. It had also been proposed to the parents that this is a good thing because kids are all moving around at this time. Your child will not be stigmatized by being pulled out because every kid is going somewhere during the intervention block. But the problem was students who have ESE services should be getting every service that every other kid gets, plus their own services.

Participant 6 discussed challenges with providing consistent support to students who are receiving ESE services:

Tier 3 is also very hard because our ESE population is very large, and so we have students who are ESE who need the Tier 3 support, but then when they take up my entire Tier 3 group, I can't identify other students who might need it. So that balance is very tricky, but when I do pull them, I try and get the bottom 25%. Sometimes, it really depends on, is the student, if it's an ESE student, are they making gains with the ESE? If they are making some gains, we'll keep them out for the majority but maybe pull them in once a week for Tier 3 intervention. That way I can access some of the other kids.

Participant 5 added a different perspective when discussing the challenge for applying the appropriate levels of support for struggling fourth- and fifth-grade students:

For the fourth- and fifth-grade teachers, is that they really are, [the] “now what?” What're you going to. Now they've gotten all this way and they're so far behind, what can we do differently? And so, the challenge is finding an intervention, and finding a way to close the gap for my intermediate kids, as compared to my primary kids.

Theme One, Sub-theme Three: Prevention Based Mindsets

Every school has a unique history, community, and set of needs that inform the practices, values, and beliefs that influence the support given to students. It is critical that individuals maintain an open, optimistic mindset so that the MTSS can be implemented with fidelity. For positive change to occur in the school, the individuals charged with carrying out the design and implementation of the process must also be willing to change. MTSS is not a top-down process, and it requires a commitment from all involved for the process to have the impact for which it is designed. Negative mindsets can cause the process to fail and cause negative outcomes for students so that awareness can help bring about a shift from the negative to positive mindset. Participant 1 describes her determination and perseverance when tracking students' progress when she states,

I start with the team, working on Tier 2. Then Tier 3, I have my individual data meetings with the teachers and parent. And then from there I keep track of them and monitor them, and I just don't let them go. Some kids I've been tracking for a couple years. And I don't

just rush into testing, I look at what else is going on. (Participant 1, personal communication, May 31, 2019)

Participant 2 shared how using data help to begin a shift in her teachers' thinking when she described the following:

Looking at the graph showing, okay, this intervention obviously isn't working, the data is flat lining. We might need to come down a little bit and that's where the piece they say, "Oh, maybe I do need to be looking at that other skill. It's not just about the letters and the sounds, it goes a little underneath that and I need to go there." I believe this year the teachers that had their minds set are now shifted a little bit especially. I think the district has embedded that chronological awareness in the Phonemic Awareness piece into K and 1, which has really helped with their mindset for me.

On the other hand, Participant 3 had a different experience with some of her teachers:

I think we have a very small ELL population here compared to many schools. I think students who are second language learners either are assumed that they will just catch on being immersed and so there's not necessarily a need that the teacher sees to start the MTSS process for them. That's one side, the other side is jumping too far to the other direction, where a student who maybe is ELL and has had a couple of years of ELL instruction. Well, things aren't working very well still, so maybe we need to have them evaluated. It's trying to find a fix for someone whose language acquisition just might be taking the five to seven years that it's supposed to. I see some misconceptions about ELL learners sometimes.

When asked how environmental factors influence expectations for students, Participant 4 articulated the importance of mindset by sharing what typically happens at her school:

If you had asked me that question before I started at this school, I would have said that it doesn't matter. When I came to this school, I saw the difference. There were teachers where it didn't matter. They understood it and worked around it. And there were teachers that couldn't get past it. For the teachers that couldn't get past it, it definitely lowered their expectations of the children, which was frustrating to me. "Yes, I know because I live down the street from them, but that's okay because I'm going to make sure they get those" and they move. Those are the teachers that we need to have more of than less of.

Participant 5 provided another example of teachers' mindsets:

Well, I think that, I still have difficult with the buy-in for my teachers, all my teachers, I mean we have a strong group of teachers that believe in the process, but they are still some teachers who are just like, "Oh they just need to be tested, they just need to be placed in the program," and I know we really need to go back and look at what're you doing in your small group class? I can give them intervention, but that's not gonna cure them. I mean, you have to make sure that you're providing that small-group direct instruction. What're you doing differently in your classroom to have this kid in this specific area? So, I mean I hate to be negative, but that . . . Those negative behaviors stand out to me more, unfortunately, than the positive ones, so that's kind of what I'm wanting the teachers to see that, this just isn't a process to get to special education. And what's so special about special education?"

The following explanation was given by Participant 6, speaking to the mindset of her teachers and how she experiences them:

I have seen across the board just a lot of teachers who will look at a student who has not had as many opportunities to have a good environment, and they feel the need to lower expectations. Where, on the other end of the spectrum, they see that that child has a lot more experiences, and their parents are more involved, and their environment's better, so they have higher expectations. And trying to get the teachers to keep that even-keeled expectation across the board and try and show them, okay well, this student, although he may have more opportunities and a better environment, he could still have a learning disability. And this student, although they're not getting enough sleep at night, or they're hungry, they still need to be pushed to perform at the same level no matter what.

Participant 7 shared this about the teachers at the school where she is a resource teacher:

I hear that a lot and it saddens me because if you know a child's environment outside of this school, why don't you try to make and adjust some expectations so that child could be successful. I say that I think 50 million times a day, "Don't fault the child for what he has no control over. How can you change that for him when he gets here? If you know that there are no resources for that child at home to do homework, either give him an opportunity to do it before he leaves or you give him a baggie with the resources in to complete the assignment. You're going to have to make the adjustment for the child. Don't blame the child for what he has no control over and hear it a lot."

Theme Two: Clear Expectations for Implementation

One of the primary roles of the resource teacher is to establish a common language for implementation and to set clear expectations to attain the outcomes of MTSS implementation. To do so, school staff must clearly define who is responsible for what and how these individuals will be held accountable. Throughout the interviews, the research participants consistently expressed ownership of many of the components of implementation for their schools. An example of how resource teachers view their role can be found in Participant 1's statement:

Honestly, I'm the one that just takes the initiative and I listen to my teachers, and that's how I go from there on. It looks different in every grade level. So sometimes I want it a certain way, but I've got to listen to the teachers, and we come together and do it. So that's how I understand it. I just talk to the teachers, look at the data, and in my expertise, and put it all in one.

As part of defining clear expectations for implementation, the participants described the importance of assessment practices, communication, and collaboration. Sub-theme one (assessment practices) and sub-theme two (communication and collaboration) were derived from the analysis.

Theme Two, Sub-theme One: Assessment practices

Assessment practices look slightly different at each tier of instruction or intervention. Typically, at Tier 1, the assessments include both formative and summative types. The frequency of these assessments can range from daily to quarterly and/or end of the year summative assessments. Tier 2 assessments are usually designed to meet the students' needs and the

frequency of the assessments can be as frequent as once a week or as long as once a month. At the Tier 3 level, assessments are designed to be administered frequently. The frequency of the assessment should match the intensity of the student's needs. In other words, students with the greatest deficiencies should be assessed more frequently.

Participant 5 shares the importance of looking at multiple sources of data: "But we also look at the formative assessments, and we look at i-Ready, so there's multiple data that came to the table, other than just the progress monitoring graphs" (Participant 5, personal communication, May 31, 2019).

Participant 2 also shared her school's assessment practices:

Well, we always use our data. We use lots of pieces. We always use our iReady diagnostic, we use our growth monitoring if it's a grade level that's doing it. I require for all Tier 3 kids, weekly data points on a separate graph not through iReady. We also look at the CRMs and their Common Assessment and how they did. We look at all pieces of data, not just the one piece, because not every kid tests well computer-based compared to one on one. We do a lot of CORE Phonics Surveys to figure out exactly where the intervention needs to take place.

Participant 3 shared an example of how she uses assessment data to structure one grade level's approach to meeting the needs of their students:

Each year I actually sit with them and we look, student by student, at the data that we had from the previous year, if it exists. The beginning of the year data that we have and determine how we are going to address their needs and who is going to do it, and what materials we're going to use. And then I sit with them. We go through all the data, we go

through all the kids, we make the plan, then I help them carry out the plan and implement it. And I come back at the next are you ready diagnostic or at another interval to look at how well the data—whether the students have improved or not, then determine, okay, what's the next step going to be? Also, at my school, I've been the staffing specialist, so I do understand, sometimes when an evaluation is needed, and what that could lead to.

She provided another example of the importance of assessment data when she shared her experience with kindergarten teachers at her school:

We really addressed phonics probably for two solid months every day with that intervention group, and we went from having 27 students, according to one measure that were lacking in phonics; down to ten the next time. We were able to celebrate, okay this is working; let's continue—for some students who are already feeling successful with phonics, we can move on to vocabulary or comprehension. For some that are still struggling, maybe we'll do some of both. But we definitely could see a measurable impact, and I think that is probably one of the biggest keys to the MTSS process is figuring out what to measure and sharing that data with your stakeholders because nobody wants to be a part of something they don't think is working. So when you show them that it's working, then they're more apt to buy in next time.

Participant 6 offered the following insights into her school's assessment practices:

Our Tier 1, of course, is everybody, and they get the core instruction, and then Tier 2 is the bottom 25% of each classroom, so one of the things that my colleague, who is also. . . She really works with the Tier 2, as well, she and my other colleague, they're the Tier 2 for math. She and I get together and we look at the i-Ready scores, and we kind of see

how they've been placed, based on the diagnostics. We've placed them based on that. However, during our Tier 2 meetings, teachers might have concerns or say like, "This kid did really badly on the test but this is how he does," and so we kind of fluctuate, based on the teacher input. So, Tier 1 is like the core, and then Tier 2, we work on . . . Like in reading, they'll work on a grade level below the reading comprehension, and then in math, they kind of work on trailing standards. Then, for Tier 3, we have a lot of parent requests for evaluations, so sometimes that really skews it, because we have to then take some kids who weren't technically in Tier 3 and put them there to try and figure out, do they actually have a disability or a need for intervention? But Tier 3, we really try to take the very bottom 25% of the grade level, and we try to go based on i-Ready.

Theme Two, Sub-theme Two: Communication and collaboration

Another critical element that must exist for the MTSS process to be successful and sustainable is strong, interrelated, and ongoing collaboration and communication among those who provide instruction, intervention, or monitor student outcomes. Participant 7 communicated that she prides herself on ensuring that she has close relationships with the staff members she serves:

Yes. I have an open-door policy. Our teachers know that they can just come and talk, so they come to me and they are discussing whatever issue they are having with the children. If they're struggling in the classroom, what can I do? We have that initial conversation, the teacher and I, "What are you doing? What are you using for your resources, are you doing small group first of all, are you meeting with the kids?"

Participant 7 also explains the vitality of parent involvement in the collaboration and communication process:

Once we get the initial diagnostic, and the teacher and I have a conversation then we involve the parent. The parent will come in and we'll talk to the parent. We'll ask the parent, 'Do you agree? What do you see at home when you're reading with your child? Do you see the same thing?' And we'll all come to an agreement. (Participant 7, personal communication, June 1, 2019)

Participant 4 gave the following response when asked to describe a successful problem-solving session involving team members:

We sit down, we meet, we look at the data. We are able to discuss the data, classroom observation, and teacher input. We look at all of these things and we come to the consensus as a team that there is a strategy that will or work or that we need to move forward for open consent. That is a successful meeting to me. That something is actually done at the end of the meeting and I don't feel like it was a waste of everyone's time. (Participant 7, personal communication, June 1, 2019)

Participant 2 shared a different experience regarding collaboration and communication:

I have a grade level that's on board, but one teacher never brings children my way. We've never met on this Tier 3 kid even though I continue to email out. That to me, would be a disaster because I know this kid is out there but the teacher doesn't want to submit the paperwork or collect the weekly data, so I have to start going and I have to collect that piece of data to show them and prove to them, "Look, we are struggling and this is what

we need.” I do have a teacher like that in 1st grade. That would be a disaster to me because my motto has always been, “We will not fall through a crack.”

Theme Two, Sub-theme Three: Implementation fidelity

The participants communicated the importance of assessing fidelity within the MTSS process for its success. Fidelity must be checked to ensure the implementation of the critical components, the problem-solving process at all tiers of instruction/intervention, and the fidelity of aligning evidenced-based instruction and interventions matched to the students’ needs.

Participant 2 describes her heavy involvement with assessing fidelity of implementation:

As the MTSS Coach I'm very involved with the students on my radar, monitoring their data, holding meetings as needed, whether it's every four to six weeks, six to eight weeks, helping determine next steps for them, consent for them, and we're very true to the process here. (Participant 2, personal communication, May 31, 2019)

Participant 2 goes on to add what she describes as a successful problem-solving meeting:

It's when we sit and analyze the data, we come up with a plan, we find the right change in intervention or determine the one that's still working, and the child continues to make gains, that's a positive meeting to me. Any time a student starts slipping, interventions begin. As soon as a teacher has determined that a child has shifted to Tier 3, I made my own MTSS checklist, I could share that with you. It's just basically everything I need to know. It's just basically everything I need to know. What interventions are provided, what are you doing? What program are you using? Have they had their vision, their hearing checked? Are they coming to school? How often are you providing

interventions? It's just on a very easy to fill out sheet. They have to submit that to me with their iReady data and their weekly progress monitoring graph attached to that.

Other participants, while not explicitly stating their processes for ensuring fidelity, disclosed a level of dissatisfaction, even frustration toward MTSS processes, implementation, and problem solving in their school.

Participant 1 expressed concern that the MTSS process is not fully embedded with all grade levels:

I feel like, I'm going to be honest with you, I see it more in K through two. I feel like, especially kindergarten, I'll talk about that. At first, before I came on, they really weren't even doing MTSS as strong as they are now. And now, I feel like not all those kids went to have a strong VPK background, which is my biggest thing. I feel like kindergarten's the hardest because there're so many different levels. I would say fifth grade. I don't feel like . . . if you're not switching, then you have to be very strong with then pulling those small groups during that Tier 2 time, and I don't know if that was done, because it takes a lot of discipline and structure. So I feel like if I have to pick a grade level, I feel like that was where probably it didn't.

Participant 3 shared similar experiences with her fourth- and fifth-grade implementations:

In fourth and fifth grade, it becomes a challenge because it's so much just comprehension and saying, "He doesn't understand main idea versus an author's perspective." It's kind of nebulous for them. I have tried to help fourth grade, for example, kind of buy in to the MTSS process more. They have done it, but they've done more about asking me to come in and show them or try to do it for them. Many of them are not comfortable with the

MTSS process. And then they have the logistic challenge of their departmentalized, so you have an ELA teacher who, if they are going to do intervention with eight students out of 22 in their homeroom, and then there's another 22 in the math group across the hall, you're talking about somebody holding on to a lot of kids while another teacher delivers intervention. So sometimes it's just the logistics of getting the right people in time, and materials, and help, and support in the right place.

Participant 5 explained how their MTSS process has evolved:

When we first started, when I first came here, they didn't have a very strong MTSS process, so it kind of just started with just a data, but that time we weren't i-Ready, so with whatever data, clash of data that the teachers had. But now, each year, we end the year with looking at i-Ready data in the form of the assessments that the teachers have conducted over the year and then we identify those two factors and then we decide who needs that tier three intervention, and then when the scores come in over the summer, we add that third factor, and then that's how we get our groups for the beginning of the school year.

Theme Two, Sub-theme Four: Role of resource teacher

For the MTSS to be effective, schools must ensure that they have given stakeholders the fundamentals elements of the MTSS infrastructure. One of the ways that schools are providing these fundamental elements is by assigning resource teachers this responsibility. Although schools are using this practice, there is no defined role at the state, district, or school level for the resource teacher who leads MTSS at their school to bring clarity to this particular practice. When

asked, "How do you understand your role and responsibilities as resource teacher who leads implementation in schools?" participants seemed very confident in their understanding.

Participant 1:

Honestly, I'm the one who just takes the initiative and I listen to my teachers, and that's how I go from there on. It looks different in every grade level. So sometimes I want it a certain way, but I've got to listen to the teachers, and we come together and do it. So that's how I understand it. I just talk to the teachers, look at the data, and in my expertise, and put it all in one.

Participant 2:

I feel like it's my role to make sure nobody falls through the cracks in this building, that all children are getting the interventions they need and therefore the help that they need." If they need testing, if they switch back to Tier 2, continuing to monitor, deciding how to go to consent with them, and what they need best. I feel like Resource has really helped me, especially with fourth and fifth graders, because I'm more of a primary person. The Resource piece when they added the fourth and fifth to me really helped with the comprehension piece and what to do with fourth and fifth graders that can't read.

Participant 3:

So my job partly is to make sure that the big picture is happening the way it should be, that as a school we are being true to MTSS process. But it also means that I have to dig down into individual grades, individual classes, individual teachers, and even individual kids in some cases. If I see there's a barrier that's getting in the way of that student receiving what they need, it's my job to figure out how I can remove the barrier.

Sometimes that means getting extra resources or people involved, sometimes that means me. So I've from time to time gone in and worked with students myself, in small group or one on one because there was a situation where I couldn't get it addressed another way.

Participant 4:

So, basically, I look at it as, I pay attention to the kiddos that may be getting lost. That's how I look at it. So, it's easy to look at all the data and say, "Look at all these kids. They're doing great. They're doing wonderful." But I kind of focus my attention on the ones that are at the bottom or as low as 30% and I focus my attention there. I want to see what the breakdown is, you know. Is there something going on at home? Are they hungry? Were they cold that day? Are they jumpy in class? Can they not focus? Do we need to do an eyesight test again? There's a lot of factors that go into being able to sit, focus, and learn in the classroom. I think it's important for someone in the MTSS position kind of hone in on that and make sure that the factors are appropriate. Not just for the ones that are doing well, but for everyone.

Participant 5:

So, my role is I, at this time, I do all the preparing for the time that we need to get ready for data checks. As the printing of the MTSS graphs, making sure that those graphs are updated, that they're progress monitoring, that the progress monitoring tries to match the intervention as best as possible, I'm sure you've heard that, that's one of our things that we keep working on, but I do all of that and then I regroup and send out emails to the teachers making sure that when we do regroup that this person's getting picked up, this one's... And meeting with parents to identify, to let them know, that notification your

child's receiving services... Now we send out the notification form, but a lot of times I will meet my most... The kids that are significantly below grade level, the most severe kids, with parents just to kind of inform them. Because I'm really big at making sure that parents understand they're all here at our meetings. I usually do not like to have an MTSS meeting without a parent. If they're not participating by phone, then they need to be here, otherwise I reschedule.”

Participant 6:

All right, so my role as MTSS, I have a para who really works with me, so he comes in, we talk about what we want to do, he monitors their progress and I review it, and then I look at it and say, "Okay, I think this is what we need to do," and any time that I can be in and monitor while he's teaching, I'll kind of step in and help him out a little bit. He's fantastic. I do wish that there was budget money to have a straight MTSS person, because I do feel like because I have multiple roles, the staffing specialist portion takes up a lot of time and energy, and really I don't have the time I would like to, to devote to that MTSS. That's one of those balances, is trying to figure out. My role right now is looking at interventions, monitoring the progress, making sure that they're making progress. If they're not making progress, what should we change to try and get them to make that progress?

Participant 7:

Well, I've had training, gone to the MTSS training. Here, I think we just have the liberty of just doing your job and just using... I don't want to say common sense and I'm a parent first, so I have... My daughter is a kindergarten teacher here, I have an older son, so I

have kids and I've been in the school system as a parent in the table of they're saying, "My son had learning disability." "Well, no he does not." You know what I mean. I've had a personal experience and then here my role as a resource teacher is that we're all in this together and we're here to help. To help each other and I've just had the liberty that our principal was like, "Just help, just do the job. So, whenever you get from your meetings, whatever you feel that needs to be implemented, do it.

A shared consensus emerged within this group in that many mentioned the challenge of having multiple conflicting responsibilities within the role of leading MTSS implementation in their schools. This was articulated by Participant 6:

Just that I do miss the brilliant interacting with the students a lot. Being the staffing specialist, I can't devote 100% of my time to the interventions that I would like to and I miss doing that. I do feel that it would be more successful if I was able to not only plan the interventions, and but be able to interact with the students and provide intervention. I think that would be helpful, not because I'm fantastic, but because I do think that that knowledge helps when you're teaching.

Participant 7 expressed similar feelings:

Well, as the resource teacher, when they have that resource so they attach a lot of things to that job description that sometimes you just feel like you're not able to... I was saying that with the resource teacher, of course with MTSS, we have a lot of other duties attached to our job. It's hard to really feel like you're affective. I know for myself I'm here late, 6:00 just to make sure that I'm doing all I can do as MTSS. I love being the MTSS coach for our school. I just wish that when decisions are being made at the district level

that they consider us down here before they make decisions because I don't think that they really understand all that happens here.

Theme Two, Sub-theme Five: Shared decision making

Part of the work of the resource teacher is to facilitate team-based, collaborative problem-solving processes. Participant 1 shared an example of a challenge during a team-based collaborative problem-solving meeting. Participant 1 felt as if the meeting was a challenge because

I don't feel like it was a team decision. Where the other ones we all worked as a team to make Tier 2, we had a team position and then somebody didn't like it and it went astray. So I feel like working as a team is a very big deal too. I think 100% of the teachers have to be involved too, and they all have to agree. And I think that was the issue. There was a split. (Participant 1, personal communication, May 31, 2019)

Participant 7 described what happens when there is not consensus at her school:

Because now I like for everybody to be involved, and I like for everybody to have a voice, and I like... We have one male on our campus, one teacher and all the rest of us are females so you don't have any males, but I would like for everybody to agree but sometimes we won't. Then I call the shot and I say, "Based on all of this what we've talked about, based on this data, this is where we're going to start and this is the resource we're going to use because this is what you say is most beneficial or this is where we've seen for this grade level to get the most bang for our buck, so we're going to start here."

Participant 3 elaborated further regarding shared decision-making at her school:

Okay, so that kind of is made in partnership with administration, teachers, and coaches about who starts the process and how it's organized at the grade level whether a teacher wants to deliver intervention to their own students or whether a group of teachers wants to team up and I would take the group and you do my enrichment students or what have you. And then we determine a length of time to go with the intervention, implement it, and then we'll take data along the way, it's usually biweekly. But we'll come back together, it could be four to six weeks. I wish it were more firm, but it could be anywhere from four to six weeks, I would say, to even two months, possibly, when we come back as a group and look and see have some more measures to see if it's working. If it's working . . . great. We have students who moved out of Tier 2, back into Tier 1. But we also have student where their intervention teacher, homeroom teacher and all stakeholders feel like they are not making the progress that they should, even with the intervention. And in some cases here, because we're kind of a higher socioeconomic school, they've also let parents know and there may be outside tutoring going on too, so you've got all these layers of support and your student is not progressing the way you think they should then they may bring them to my attention again. We may meet again as a team and bump them up to Tier 3. Dig down deeper into a lower skill and take data weekly and look at whether that is working. And that's great if it is, sometimes it just continues and continues. And other times it is sometimes used as decision-making to look at further evaluation or something like that.”

Theme Two, Sub-theme Six: Transition practices

The importance of ongoing progress monitoring and documentation is essential to ensure that no students get left behind or falls through the cracks. During staff or position turnover, there is potential for momentum to be lost and/or for documentation to become misplaced.

Participant 2 shared an experience that helps to highlight the importance of having a clear system to support students who experience consistent mobility and quickly finding stability:

But I could think of maybe a negative case here where it's not could have a positive situation. The teacher is retiring and the child is really struggling. We did a room change in the last 10 days and it's been amazing what the difference of that environment for that child has made, going from pulling home schooling to church school, to now we want to continue with public school because we see it does make a difference with the environment in the classroom..

Participant 3 discussed retention and questions that need to be answered when retention is considered:

The MTSS process . . . it's meant to close gaps. Sometimes, though, to meet their needs you need more than just intervention time. You might need extra people, you might need to find out more, so you might need to have them evaluated for a program. In some cases, with parents as partners, you can speak on retaining them. That's usually . . . we look at that in either kindergarten or first grade as lower grade as possible if we're going to do that. But that's also hand in hand with asking ourselves, "What are we going to do next year differently than we're doing right now?" Because it does you no good to repeat a

grade and do the very same thing. You have to ask yourself, “what can I do differently to meet their needs?”

Participant 4 described an example of what could happen during staff turnover:

Things start to unravel as you work with a group of people and then you might be new to a school and then you find documentation that this child probably should have been further along in the process, but that wasn't known to you. Or it wasn't taken care of. That was kind of disastrous for us, and the end result was that the child has found some sort of coping mechanism and was able to get through and do okay. Okay enough not to qualify for anything else. So I feel like we missed our window of opportunity and that was a disaster because he should have been getting the services that he needed. But, because when you start digging, you find things.

She went on to explain, “And when you change out and not notarize or put things in notice on PEER or document that this is happening, then the people that come in, miss those things.”

Participant 5 described her school’s identification process for transitioning students: So, we try to start usually by Labor Day. So we usually have two days before school starts with those three factors, and then we identify our groups. However, there's also been those kids that come in with the rates high, so the kids that come into our school we're always constantly looking at what they come with to make sure that is there any, are they in that lowest 25%, do we need to rearrange some groups for them, but usually we start off with our own kids and get that started, and then monthly as we meet, we meet every month, we'll revise and look at that again to see who needs to be rearranged in the system.

Theme Three: Sufficient Support and Technical Assistance

Resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools must possess a certain set of skills to support stakeholders through high quality implementation efforts and sustainability. The participants communicated the ongoing need for leadership support and technical assistance.

Theme Three, Sub-theme One: Credibility and trust

Resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools must be able to demonstrate and model effective interpersonal communication skills that ultimately build trusting relationships. Fostering trusting relationships will support fidelity of MTSS implementation and problem-solving processes. Knowledge and expertise help to establish credibility among staff providing school-based support. Participant 3 seemed to understand this:

I think it is crucial to have someone leading MTSS who's been a classroom teacher. I think there is a perspective on that you don't want to miss. They are down in the trenches, dealing, making decisions, minute by minute. Per instruction on who they target and how they target the skills for the kids. I also have reading endorsements, so I know what's needed in a child's development and been able to pinpoint what's lacking when something is lacking.

Participant 3 further recognized that possessing knowledge and expertise does not solve all challenges that exist in establishing credibility and trust among MTSS personnel: “I would say a disbelief [exists] that the way I'm proposing is better than the way that they've been doing it [and,

this] way that they've been doing it goes back to a prior administration. It's the way they've always done it. Why now are you telling me something different?"

Beyond knowledge and expertise, Participant 2 acknowledged professional tenure as significant to the process of establishing trust among staff: "I think I'm older than a lot of people here. They know I've been here a long time and they respect that, so they do listen to me here." In contrast, participants disclosed barriers to the establishing of trust. Participant 2, along with other participants, later disclosed barriers to trust building: "We had a headstrong teacher that just continued to do it their way. They would only collect the data they felt was important to that grade level."

Participant 4 described trust issues that exist related to school support personnel:

It can be challenging when not everyone in the MTSS process is on the same page. That can be challenging because we go to bat for our kiddos, and sometimes the school psych may not be on the same page as you are. And it feels as though they are giving you roadblocks instead of actually helping. I think that has been very challenging, trying to navigate through the process.

Participant 5 described an example when she had a clash in philosophy with another teacher:

Well, like I said, I think that the one teacher, our Philosophies class...Because she wanted to retain him, and I didn't, and I couldn't see the benefits of the retention. But she has a good heart, she wanted what's best for the kid, but at the same time I'm looking at that big picture, and she's looking at her class, my one student who she had invested interest in that she's loved all year long, and I'm not the one who's having to teach that student.

Participant 6 shared an example that demonstrated the importance of trust with parents when she describes a parent who does not trust the process:

The other set of parents still are not on board, and in many times throughout the MTSS process I had meetings with them, I would have to show them like, the scope and sequence of the kindergarten and kind of be like, this is what your child needs to be doing right now. This is a work sample of what a grade level student is doing, this is an ESE student, and this is your student, who is an ESOL student, but this is where he's at. And really show them where he needed to be. So, the parents were not on board in either case, and I think that really hindered the process because I do think that, if they had been on board, even much earlier in their children's lives, it would have made a difference on the outcome.

Participant 7 described a situation when she lost trust in one of her teachers who was forthcoming about not implementing with fidelity:

I meet with the teacher and I'm like, "Okay, we went through this process and this is what you're saying. You're saying you're meeting with five kids three times a week working on this and this is the data that you're giving me." "Yes." I said, "But he said, he's not meeting with you. He's not even playing these games with you." "Well, you know I have all this," and then the tears flow and everything and I said, "Don't you know this is a legal matter, this is just not ethical first of all," and it could have led us into a legal situation, second of all. I said, "If you needed support, why didn't you just come and say, hey, can you come in and . . . I just can't do it. I'm overwhelmed." I said, "We have an open-door policy, I always do and you can come and tell me anything." I said, "But now you're

going to have to tell me where you're doing this and I'm going to have to come in and watch you. I mean, why should we have to do that? Why should I have to watch you do what you said you're going to do?" That was a tough one with the teacher and involved the principal and it was a heavy conversation.

Theme Three, Sub-theme Two: Training and support

Training and support are vital to the success and sustainability of the MTSS process because they increase teachers' capacity to implement the process as well as overall staff capacity to meet important timelines. Participant 3 describes an instance when training was needed: "We helped one of the third-grade teachers, who was an intervention teacher, get extra training because she wasn't even used to having to teach phonics anymore" (Participant 3, personal communication, May 31, 2019). Participant 1 speaks to how training helped her to build capacity in her role: "So that helped me as well as just keeping up with my training, I guess. I went to a lot of workshops and training to be a coach, so that also helps too."

Participant 2 shared about the significance of support as she reflected on a teacher that exhibited challenges during a meeting:

What stood out for me is just the fact she didn't know what to do with a non-reader and how to best help her child. She wanted to help the child but didn't know what to do. I think it's getting, not only that teacher in with other teams, it's getting them onboard to the process, to the fidelity of the process, and insuring that everything occurring the way it should, the interventions and especially the progress monitoring piece and helping them find the time in which to do that in their rooms when they have a lot of other kids that

they have to work with, especially, we teach a lot in small groups here, so finding that extra time, getting in there, helping them with their schedules, helping them plan, helping them find the right materials.”

Participant 4 also shared a situation of when training could have helped to generate a positive outcome during this meeting:

We could have probably given [the student] some support or open to an open consent if we had math data . . . unfortunately, I don't think his teacher at the time had a grasp of the MTSS process and how to document the data. We [would] meet, explain, and talk but then nothing happens. Therefore, we have nothing to show to the school psych and the school psych is saying well, I have no data for math. I only have data for reading because the classes are compartmentalized, so the reading teacher was doing her part, math teacher was not. So the whole thing was a disaster, and I felt like the teacher didn't understand the gravity of the situation. Mom was angry, and it was directed at me. I didn't know how to fix it, so the whole thing was a mess, if you will.

Participant 6 reflected on a time when teacher training could have been helpful, stating:

So one of the things I did notice was that with both of those students, the teachers were very new. They had not encountered students with those type of needs or behaviors before. And so their education level . . . not even education level, but maybe their experience level, really played an impact. I think if they had had more experience to pull from, it would have been helpful. They were very willing to help, they wanted to learn, they were very apt to learn. But I do think if I had more time to sit down with them and really train them, that would have helped them or given them more support.”

Summary of Results

When the qualitative interviews were analyzed, using the Colaizzi seven-step process, three themes emerged: 1) expected outcomes, 2) clear expectations for implementation, and 3) sufficient support and technical assistance. Further analysis of each of the themes revealed sub-themes that were related to the primary themes. For the theme of expected outcomes, several sub-themes were identified: (a) accountability, (b) appropriate level of support, and (c) prevention-based mindset. For the theme of clear expectations for implementation, six sub-themes were identified: (a) assessment, (b) collaboration and communication, (c) implementation fidelity, (d) roles, (e) shared decision-making, and (f) transition. Two sub-themes of the third theme, sufficient support and technical assistance, were identified: (a) credibility and trust and (b) training and support.

The analyses were conducted to identify the primary and secondary themes. The themes identified were supported by the participants' quotes, provided during the semi-structured interviews. Each of the themes and sub-themes will be discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The final chapter of this phenomenological study reviews the statement of the problem and the research methodology and presents a summary of the findings. In this chapter, a discussion of the findings, organized by theme, is presented, and the findings within the framework that the researcher used are considered. Whereas the previous chapter presented findings to produce a narrative of the resource teachers' lived experiences, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the researcher's interpretation and synthesis of the resource teachers' insights. This chapter attempts to construct a holistic understanding of MTSS implementation within the context of the phenomenon of disproportionality through the lenses and perspectives of educators leading MTSS efforts. The discussion takes into consideration the literature on the disproportionality as it impacts Black male students as well as the systemic, organizational, and social structures that have contributed to its persistence. The implications of the findings are intended to increase understanding, amplify awareness, and deepen capacity to address the issue as well as to provide a framework for the elimination of the disproportionate representation of Black male students in special education. Finally, the study's limitations and recommendations for future research are presented.

Statement of the Problem

Historically, there have been inconsistencies in the referral and identification of students in special education. Schools are required to establish a system of support to ensure that when

students are referred for special education, they are provided with appropriate support. However, in many situations, students are inaccurately referred, misidentified, and misdiagnosed as needing special education when, indeed, they do not (Bruce & Venkatesh, 2014; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Skiba et al., 2008; Sullivan, 2011). When misidentification occurs, as it does for many Black male students, it results in a disproportionate ratio of membership in special education compared to that of other subgroups. The persistence of overrepresentation of Black male students referred and placed in special education classes causes disproportionality and underscores the need for exploration and emphasizes reason for concern.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to ascertain if, in the lived experiences and perspectives of resource teachers responsible for leading multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) implementation in their schools, there is an awareness of an overrepresentation of Black males being referred for special education services. This approach allows the researcher to investigate the phenomenon of disproportionality of Black male students represented in special education programs by examining the lived experiences of the resource teachers. Furthermore, the research question was designed to consider the resource teachers' perceptions of the MTSS process and their responsibilities with respect to the previous research and current state and federal policy.

The researcher collected qualitative interview data to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools. Through the analysis of semi-structured, in-depth interviews, the researcher constructed a holistic view of the

resource teachers' perceptions as well as extrapolated common themes from their lived experiences as MTSS leaders in their schools.

Summary of the Findings

Current federal legislation requires school districts to provide effective systems of supports (e.g. ,MTSS) to create “turn around” schools, provide targeted curricula, instruction, and interventions, and improve outcomes for all students, especially those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds (ESSA, 2015; Horner et al, 2019; Horner, Sugai, & Fixsen, 2017; Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Bezdek, 2013; Nagro, Hooks, & Fraser, 2019). The purpose of MTSS is to provide direct supports to students who are at risk for disabilities by layering an adequate amount of support and interventions as needed with the goal of improving the outcomes for students identified as experiencing early risks (Hunter et. al., 2015; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014). What proves challenging, due to the autonomy that school districts, and in some cases, school campuses have, is effective systematic implementation of a tiered system of support for both academic and behavior needs of students. The results of this study identify considerations critical to improving the process for referring and identifying students for special education with the ultimate goal of limiting inappropriate referrals and classification of Black male students in special education (National Education Association, 2008; Smith, 2004; Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Miranda et al., 2014). Further, this study contributes to the field of educational leadership by identifying existing challenges that hinder schools and districts in effecting tiered models such as MTSS (Arden et. al., 2017; Coyne, et. al., 2016). Interview data collected in this study reveal that the resource teachers felt that they had

the necessary technical skills, knowledge, and expertise to carry out essential processes involved with MTSS implementation according to the study's research and literature (Scott et. al, 2019; Bouck & Cosby, 2019; Nagro et. al., 2019). However, there is a lack of awareness by the resource teachers' in understanding how the MTSS process they lead impact referrals (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services 2002a; Bruce & Venkatesh, 2014; Harry & Klingner, 2014) of Black male students to special education.

This study also greatly contributes to the field of educational leadership in realizing barriers that may exist in carrying out an educational reform, such as MTSS and reducing disproportional representation (Bal et. al, 2014) of Black male students in special education. It became apparent through the data presented in this study that administrators are adequately armed with key foundational concepts rooted in educational leadership research and literature. However, the resource teachers in this study shared challenges and offered suggestions that could help to lay the foundation for future policymakers and federal, state, and local educational agencies as they continue to create avenues to enhance their practices and meet the needs of all the students they serve. By incorporating the perceptions of the resource teachers who participated in the research study, school and district leaders can influence the future of education and direct the vision of creating greater equity in schools (Dulaney, Hallam, & Wall, 2013).

In this study, three overarching themes and 11 sub-themes emerged to answer the study's research question. Using rich descriptions and direct words and phrases from the participants, these themes were identified and presented with supporting data in Chapter Four. The three themes that emerged from the data included (a) expected outcomes of implementation,

(b) clear expectations for implementation, and (c) sufficient support and technical assistance. An interesting finding was what was not said by the resource teachers in the interview. The literature and the national data lead the researcher to believe that the process of referral to special education placement is the next step of the MTSS process. When students in the upper tiers of the MTSS process are not succeeding academically and/or behaviorally, resource teachers refer the students for assessment for special education services. No subjects in this study mentioned the referral process.

Interpretation of Findings

This section will present each of the three themes identified in the study, supported by literature. These three themes will answer the research question on which the study focused:

How do resource teachers view their role and its impact on the MTSS process leading to special education programming for minority sub group populations?

Theme 1: Expected Outcomes of Implementation

Resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in schools are critical to the overall success of both the school and individual students. McHugh & Barlow, (2012) would agree that MTSS requires a systemic approach for which all stakeholders must be on board from the beginning to help inform the program's development, implementation, and evaluation (Forman & Crystal, 2015). MTSS relies on personnel who value collaboration and welcome and use the problem solving team's expertise to make data-based decisions on what is best for the students

that the process is intended to serve (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). These results indicate that collaboration and the skill of effectively engaging teams are critical to implementing the MTSS process. Just as Nicholas and Antonio (2012) suggest, instructional decisions require input and feedback from team members. Strategic support from multiple disciplines, including the leadership of the resource teachers, appears to be essential (Marzano et al., 2016).

Theme 2: Clear Expectations for Implementation

All participants expressed responsibility for students' learning. By sharing responsibility for all students' learning, the resource teachers promoted collaboration, communication, and high expectations; therefore, equity became more realistic (Sampson et al., 2019). This finding was consistent with Lezotte's well-accepted research highlighting the importance of high expectations (Lezotte, 1997). The participants understood the importance of communication and collaboration throughout the MTSS process. The participants communicated the value of working collaboratively to make decisions and solve problems. Professional collaboration has been conceived as one of the primary vehicles for school improvement (Newmann & Welhage, 1995; Marshall, 2016). The notion of shared mission and vision is one of the trademarks of professional learning communities and is aligned with the responses the resource teachers provided in response to the research question (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). In general, the study participants thought they were adequately prepared and had the necessary skills and expertise to lead MTSS implementation in their schools. Nonetheless, there were some areas the participants believed hindered them from being the most effective in their roles. The issue of having multiple roles lead to role confusion and, in addition to leading MTSS, took time away from them being

the resource that they needed to be to support teachers (Fixen, Blasé, Metz, & Van Dyke, 2013). The participants agreed that they aligned with OSEP technical assistance when stating they needed more time with classroom teachers' data use in determining the most appropriate interventions for students; time facilitating the problem-solving and decision-making meetings; and, time monitoring the proposed interventions to ensure fidelity of implementation. (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2015). Additionally, the subjects stated the importance of helping teachers to consistently progress monitor and develop graphs from their progress-monitoring data to make wise decisions on next steps. Effective allocation of resources and focus on priorities was supported in this research study and aligned with the findings of Parret & Budge (2012) as well as has been the research of Danielson (2002). Distributive, collaborative leadership has been highlighted as a best practice among school leaders (Kafele, 2015; Marzano et al., 2016) This research study suggests that collaboration and clear expectations are vital for resource teachers to be effective (Donohoo, 2017; Hattie, 2016) yet did not discuss collaboration as it relates to leadership knowledge and skills.

Theme 3: Sufficient Support and Technical Assistance

MTSS implementation requires a commitment from every stakeholder who will be operating in the system (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). MTSS cannot be implemented solely by the resource teacher. All members involved are responsible for contributing to and informing the development and implementation of the MTSS process (O'Connor & Freeman, 2012). Because

of this, the stakeholders must create an atmosphere of trust to be able to solve problems and make decisions objectively.

There was agreement among the study participants that sometimes philosophies differ during these meetings; there were also reports of teachers' lack of experience and expertise slowing the process. Therefore, there is a need for the district to develop a technical assistance document or guide that outlines clear expectations for the implementation of MTSS. This guide, suggested by the participants, can be used as a resource when conflict arises and could maintain the credibility of the process and provide stability as the stakeholders work through their concerns. Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) and other researchers have documented the need for systemic, consistent professional development so that all educators have a similar foundation for decision-making (Bender & Shores, 2007; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Reeves, 2006) similar to the proposed guide. Ultimately, when agreement and cohesiveness occur concerning the expectations of the MTSS process, it can affect students' progress considerably.

The research results revealed and Sansosti and Noltemeyer (2008) findings agreed that ongoing training and professional development are needed for a shift in practice to occur. MTSS requires flexibility and modification, as stakeholders' knowledge and expertise increases. To bridge the gap between professional development and practice, classroom teachers need coaching and modeling. The resource teacher leading MTSS typically provides this support to the instructional staff. Therefore, MTSS resource teachers' experiences must be varied so that appropriate interventions are designed and used, along with high-quality progress monitoring (Bender & Shores, 2007; Shores & Chester, 2009) to support and meet the needs of the staff members being served.

Study Limitations

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological design (Creswell, 2013). Although labor intensive, qualitative research does not always lead to generalizability or verifiability outside the population of the study. The fact that the researcher is an administrator in the school district of the study may have influenced the subjects. The insights provided in this study bring forth several implications and future studies discussed in the next section.

Implications of Findings

The insights provided by the study participants have potential implications for policy and practice. These findings suggest a comprehensive review of the knowledge, skills and role of the resource teacher in connection with the disproportionate representation of Black male students in special education is evaluated. It appears, based on the qualitative interviews that many practices have been adopted to improve appropriate referrals and interventions and yet the overidentification of Black males in special education continues to exist. As these practices are defined and clarified, a repository of best practices could be developed. Using data to determine whether these practices actually affect disproportionality may be opportune in the evaluation process. Using these individuals who have developed expertise to coach others may also be beneficial as the school district focuses on building teacher and teacher leader capacity.

Improving student outcomes requires consistent attention to MTSS school implementation efforts, such as implementation fidelity, data-based problem-solving, progress monitoring, targeted and specific professional development and training, and adherence to

timelines (Handler et al., 2007). Resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools are the bridge for their schools' success in closing the knowledge gap. Findings from this study reveal that resource teachers believe that they have the knowledge and expertise to carry out this mission, but additional roles and responsibilities outside of the realm of MTSS consumes their time (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Eagle et al., (2015) agree that other competing budgetary allocations and needs could lead to ineffectiveness of meeting the needs of the staff and students they are supporting. Additionally, lack of knowledge and preparation for the leadership role of the resource teachers will have an impact on the fidelity of the process.

Participants believed that a more focused job description, centered on MTSS implementation fidelity as the primary role, would lead to a greater impact on student outcomes in schools. Mathews et. al., (2014) agrees that a coach's role is to support all stakeholders in the implementation of the core values of MTSS which in turn improves the fidelity of the implementation. Although the researcher is aware that individual schools in this large urban district have the autonomy to hire and select personnel to carry out the efforts to implement MTSS in their schools, very few schools have staff members whose sole responsibility is this mission (Sugai et. al., 2010). Therefore, it should become incumbent upon school districts to provide staff members in each school with special training for MTSS implementation to ensure that this federally funded and endorsed initiative meets the intended expectations that it has been designed to accomplish.

In many school districts, school principals are solely responsible for the recruitment and hiring of teachers and resource teachers. Principals that possess the skills, knowledge, and expertise to effectively hire qualified persons to carry out their schools' MTSS missions is

beneficial of all students, especially Black male students (Eagle, et al., 2015). Otherwise without this ability to hire knowledgeable resource teachers, disproportionality could continue to be an area of concern for schools and districts across the nation. Principals must be knowledgeable about the purpose of the MTSS process and be sure to share that knowledge with all teachers to ensure students in the process are not referred to special education on the basis of ignorance or bias. Principals, assistant principals, and other school leadership must engage in ongoing professional development around the critical components of a successful MTSS framework to stay abreast of best practices in the field (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2015). School-based leaders must understand the need to provide sufficient coaching support to their instructional staff so that MTSS resource teachers can assist MTSS team members and other staff with their problem-solving, decision-making, and collaboration with other stakeholder efforts. This will allow resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their school to sustain MTSS over time with effectiveness and efficiency and to distribute responsibilities and leadership more evenly.

Recommendations for Future Research

The role of the resource teacher is complex and demanding. Resource teachers are critical to the successful implementation of MTSS and are responsible for many activities within the MTSS framework such as (a) ensuring effective and trusting interpersonal relationships are established amongst stakeholders so the problem-solving process is efficient, (b) facilitate the accurate use of school-wide and student level data to inform the problem solving process, (c) coaching and guiding teachers by disseminating content knowledge to help inform targeted

instruction and interventions for students, and (d) providing staff with training and technical assistance.

The results of this research serve as the foundation for future research in that it provides clarity about the experiences and supports that are involved in the MTSS process. Future research may be focused on capturing resource teachers' perceptions of using the MTSS problem-solving process to support prosocial behavior as well as providing referrals to special education placement based on data. This focus will further frame and inform the comprehensiveness of the MTSS process to address disproportionality in the future. Understanding explicit and implicit bias that may confound or interfere with the MTSS process is critical for all students.

The results of this study confirmed and the findings of Eagle et. al., (2015) and Sansoti & Notemeyer (2008) agree, that there is a need to support resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools through a variety of actions. The research suggests that establishing a district framework that is consistent with providing resource teachers allocations, professional development, and uniform assessment resources across all tiers of support will prevent schools that share students from having to "start over" when the parting school does not provide data and the child's progress is sacrificed. Having uniform assessment data allows schools to access data digitally at any time from any school. Because there could be staff turnover and new resource teachers could be hired, the district should develop a uniform job description and MTSS procedural guidelines that are consistent across the district. Doing this will ensure the fidelity of implementation and maintain the integrity of the process even when there are staff changes. Since school administrators have the autonomy to hire resource teachers

who lead MTSS implementation, the school district must require school leaders to commit to ongoing training and professional development about effective MTSS frameworks and a system of accountability requiring school leaders to monitor the day-to-day implementation practices required of MTSS implementation, including but not limited to the effectiveness of their resource teacher leading the efforts. Future studies focused on the role of the resource teacher targeting more participants could also be advantageous to this large urban district to reduce the disproportionate representation of Black male students in special education. To minimize overrepresentation of any subgroup, but particularly Black male students, data must be regularly examined for disproportionality.

Conclusions

With the emphasis on students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds, ESSA has called for state and local educational agencies (LEAs) to prepare all students for a successful college experience or a fulfilling career (ESSA, 2015). As a result, these mandates have required many state and local education agencies to have adopted the MTSS framework as a framework to bolster support of students presenting with the most significant learning needs.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to ascertain if, in the lived experiences and perspectives of resource teachers responsible for leading multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) implementation in their schools, there is an awareness of an overrepresentation of Black males being referred for special education services. The researcher conducted seven semi-structured interviews and analyzed the participants' perceptions of their roles and

responsibilities leading MTSS implementation in their schools. The data collected provided a rich, detailed understanding of their perspectives while leading the MTSS mission at their respective schools.

The results of the study revealed that resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation have very demanding and complex jobs. The results also indicate a need for a broader, more district-wide approach to establishing a framework and support that is consistent across the district to (a) provide every school a resource teacher allocation solely responsible for MTSS implementation, (b) provide a uniform job description that outlines skill necessary for the role and MTSS procedural guidelines that are consistent across the district, (c) provide ongoing training and professional development for school leaders responsible for hiring staff who lead MTSS implementation so they have a sound understanding of the skills and expertise necessary to create and sustain MTSS implementation, (d) seek opportunities to conduct future research to better understand the role of the resource teacher leading the MTSS charge, and (e) continue to evaluate disproportionate referral and classification of Black male students. These findings are critical and should guide future practices not only in the district where the study was conducted but for all districts seeking to strengthen their MTSS practices to meet the needs of all learners, especially those that are underperforming. As the role of resource teachers and school leaders becomes more defined and focused on improving the MTSS process, greater equity among subgroups may be established. As the commitment to equity continues, disproportionate representation of Black male students may be reduced.

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board Office of Research & Commercialization 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501 Orlando, Florida 32826-3246 Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276 www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Determination of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1 FWA00000351, IRB00001138 To: Fredrick Brooks Date: December 07, 2018

Dear Researcher:

On 12/07/2018, the IRB reviewed the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination Project Title: Black Male Disproportionality: Exploring Resource teachers' experiences leading Multi-tiered Systems of Supports Investigator: Fredrick Brooks IRB Number: SBE-18-14581 Funding Agency: Grant Title: Research ID: N/

A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator

Manual. This letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Racine Jacques on 12/07/2018 10:19:41 AM EST

Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT



Black Male Disproportionality: Exploring Resource teachers' Experiences Leading Multi-tiered Systems of Supports

Informed Consent

Principal Investigator(s): *Fredrick Brooks*
Faculty Supervisor: *Dr. Suzanne Martin, PhD*
Investigational Site(s): *Orange County Public Schools*

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how experiences of Resource teachers charged with implementing Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) in their schools may influence disproportionality of black males in special education programs. You are being asked to take part of this research study because you are a resource teacher with at least three years of classroom teaching experience, at least one-year experience leading Multi-tiered Systems of Support Implementation in your school, and you work at a school that has at least 15 black male students. You must be 18 years of age or older to be included in the research study.

Fredrick Brooks is a student in the doctoral program at the University of Central Florida. Since the researcher is a doctoral student, Dr. Suzanne Martin, professor and Project Director, College of Community Innovation and education, will be guiding him.

What should I know about a research study?

Someone will explain this research study to you.
A research study is something you volunteer for.
Whether or not you take part is up to you.
You should take part in this study only because you want to.
You can choose not to take part in the research study.
You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
Whatever you decide will not be held against you.
Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Whom can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to Dr. Suzanne Martin, Professor and Project Director, College of Community Innovation and Education. (Email: Suzanne.Martin@ucf.edu).

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). You may talk to them at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu if:

The research team is not answering your questions, concerns, or complaints.
You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings of Resource teachers who lead MTSS implementation in their schools. Further, this phenomenological study will investigate the implementation of MTSS frameworks and its effects on referrals to special education, particularly with Black males.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 30 - 45 minutes for the interview, and approximately 10 minutes for reading and responding to the interview summary, if interested. With your permission, and audio of the interview will be recorded.

How many people will be studied?

We expect about 6-10 people will be in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

You will be asked to participate in an interview about your experiences as a resource teacher who leads MTSS implementation in a school located in a large urban school district, where there is a disproportionate amount of black males represented in exceptional education programs in comparison to other schools within the district. You do not have to answer every question. You will not lose any benefits if you skip questions. If your contact information is provided, you will be provided a summary of the interview for verification of accuracy.

Location: The interview will be conducted in an arranged location (not a school) which will allow for confidentiality and privacy.

Time required:

Audio recording:

You will be audio recorded during this study. Your answers will be confidential. If you do not want to be audio recorded, you will may still participate without being audio recorded. If you are audio recorded, the recording will be kept in a locked, safe place. The tape will be erased or destroyed in August 2020.

Risks: There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in taking part in this study.

Compensation or payment: There is no compensation or other payment to you for taking part in this study.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will in no way affect your continued enrollment, grades, employment or your relationship with the individuals who may have an interest in this study.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time it will not be held against you.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. You may also talk to them for any of the following:

The research team is not answering your questions, concerns, or complaints.

You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THE IRB EXPIRATION DATE BELOW

Signature of subject

Date

Printed name of subject

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

APPENDIX C: BRACKETING INTERVIEW

Speaker 1: Okay, we are now recording.

Mr. Mayes: Will you tell me about yourself and your educational experiences?

Speaker 1: Sure. I began my educational career as a physical education teacher with Miami Dade County Public Schools. I worked as a physical education teacher for three years with Miami Dade County Public Schools and then another six years for Orange County Public Schools. During my time with Orange County Public Schools, I applied for national board certification as a physical education teacher and was successful in obtaining that certification. Part of the expectation for being a national board certified teacher was mentoring new and beginning teachers. It was with and through that process where I gained an appreciation for leadership and quickly became interested in other aspects of leadership and administration.

Speaker 1: I then began my quest to obtain my next degree, which was in educational leadership. While in the program, my current administrator liked what I was doing with the new and beginning teachers at my school and promoted me to instructional coach, and later on that summer, we had a change of administration and a new administrator combine the curriculum resource teacher role and the instructional coaching responsibilities, and being responsible for the new and beginning teachers as well as the curriculum programs of the school, that gave me greater insight into the responsibilities of leadership and administration.

Speaker 1: During this same year, I was able to successfully complete the requirements for entry into the Orange County Public Schools Assistant Principals pool. Once I entered into the pool, I then began to apply for assistant principal vacancies, and

after a few interviews, I was able to secure my first position as an assistant principal in Orange County back in 2007/2008. I spent two and a half years at an elementary school and another two and a half years at a middle school, and then in February 2012, I received my first principalship.

Mr. Mayes: Awesome. How has these experiences prepared you for the role as an educator whose responsible for leading MTSS?

Speaker 1: I think having worked at various schools at two different levels, both elementary school and middle school, again, gave me greater insights into what it takes to serve diverse students. I've worked in schools where there was more of a homogenous population of students, and I've worked in schools that were very diverse. Working with those students and those demographics gave me insight into what it takes to meet the needs of school ... meet the needs of students, I'm sorry, and also gave me greater insights into how to prepare teachers and equip teachers with what they need to be able to support their students in the classrooms.

Speaker 1: Different teachers have different skillsets, and those teachers must be trained and equipped with the necessary knowledge, tools, strategies, approaches to be able to support the varied needs of their students in their classrooms. Having those experiences gave me a broader insight and a broader range of abilities in helping to support teachers and develop teachers and to train them on how to best support their students.

Mr. Mayes: Can you describe how MTSS is implemented at your school?

Speaker 1: Absolutely. MTSS is a process that we use at my school to support all students. It starts with the diagnosis of the student's academic abilities. We look at where students are performing in terms of their reading, math, writing abilities and what we do is as a team mostly in elementary school, we work in grade level teams to support each other on how to best support students, and those grade level teams usually turn into our problem solving and decision making teams. Every student is in the MTSS process. We start with how students are responding to the core curriculum. If students are being successful, then that lets us know that the instruction is having the desired effect.

Speaker 1: If we see that students are not responding positively to the core instruction, then we ask a question whether or not the progress that they are making is adequate. Is it questionable, or is it poor progress? Based upon how we respond to those questions, it leads us to whether or not we need to align an intervention to support that student, and usually if the answer is yes to that question, that a child is making poor progress, then as a team we determine that a tier two intervention is then needed.

Speaker 1: Once that determination is made, then a series of questions are raised to the teacher to determine what the target skill would be for that tier two intervention, what the target skill will focus, what materials that teacher will be using to target that particular skill, the frequency of the intervention, the frequency of the progress monitoring. All of those questions are answered. Then once we have an answer to those questions, then we proceed with scheduling a meeting with that

child's parent. It's very important to us that we involve the parent early on in the process, and usually we try to solicit that parent to also be a support for that child at home.

Speaker 1: We try to wrap around as much as we can support for that student to see if that tier two intervention will then in turn help that student to respond to the core instruction at some point along the lines. Data is collected at the tier two level at least bi-weekly on the child. If there is a significant gap, we may increase the frequency of that progress monitoring to weekly. It's all individualized based upon the child, their ability and how they're responding to core instruction and then that tier two intervention.

Speaker 1: If we, after three to four weeks, we don't put a black and white line to it, but we usually come back and reconvene after about three to four weeks of, or I should say three to four data points to determine if the child is responding to that tier two intervention. Again, we ask the question, is the progress adequate, is the progress questionable, or is the progress poor? In terms of if the progress is poor, we then layer another or add another layer of support, which would then determine a tier three intervention. That would be in lieu of the tier two intervention, and of course the child would continue receiving tier one, which is the core instruction.

Speaker 1: Again, at the tier three level, the intervention or the teacher or the interventionist, depending upon who's providing that tier three intervention, that person will also have to collaborate with the homeroom teacher and answer the questions of what skill are we targeting, what's the frequency of the progress monitoring, what

materials are we using. Usually tier three, the intervention is going to be quite different from tier two. We will probably or highly likely target the same skill, but we'll use different interventions. It's ideal that a different person administers the tier three intervention in hopes that the child will then in turn respond to that intervention and show signs of adequate progress.

Speaker 1: Again, any time that adequate progress is shown, we continue with those layers of support. Ultimately, what we want to see is that the child responds to the core instruction at the rate, at an adequate rate that's aligned to their ability level. At that point, is when we know that the MTSS process is sufficient and is working for that particular child.

Mr. Mayes: Okay, great. How do you understand the role and responsibilities of a resource teacher who leads MTSS implementation in your school?

Speaker 1: Okay, great question. The role of the MTSS resource teacher is that of a facilitator almost. Again, they will be responsible for ensuring that the interventions that are put in place for students are directly aligned to their needs. They will be responsible for making sure that teachers understand what their role is in implementing that intervention. They will help teachers to understand what their role is in terms of progress monitoring and graphing the data that is being collected for that particular intervention so that as a team we can continue to have conversations about how the child is progressing or not and then making the determinations on what the next step would be.

Speaker 1: At all levels of the MTSS process, whether it's a child that's not responding to core instruction or interventions, or a child that's performing at or above their current grade level, we want to make sure that the teacher continues to support that child and provide interventions or enrichment at the level that the child needs. The MTSS resource teacher is that go-to person that is a resource for teachers to make sure that they know exactly what they're doing, how they're doing and how to progress monitor, whether or not their interventions or instruction is having the impact that it's designed for.

Speaker 1: Oftentimes, the resource teacher is a go-to person when the teacher may feel like they've exhausted all of their means to support the child. Then they can become a resource and offer additional creative or innovative ways to support the child. Maybe there are some things that the teacher may not have considered. The MTSS resource teacher is also a person that should be well aware of exclusionary factors that will hinder students from performing, that might seep into the process that the teachers may not be considering such as hearing, such as vision, things such as students that are learning the English language, other things such as behavior that may also impact the child's process.

Speaker 1: Making sure those conversations about a student's social and emotional and behavior aspects also are braided into that conversation along with academics, so that we look at the whole child and those things that are impacting student progress. The MTSS resource teacher has a major role in making sure that the

students in the schools, in my school get the necessary support that they need wherever they're performing among the MTSS process.

Mr. Mayes: Awesome. Earlier you mentioned problem solving and decision making processes. Can you give me an example of when you had to lead a team through the problem solving process and the outcome was successful?

Speaker 1: Sure. When I think about leading a team through the problem solving process and the outcome was successful, it makes me think of my third grade team and the reason why they stick out to me is because the conversations in their meetings, they flow the teachers in. They offer and share ideas with one another when one teacher is, or when we're discussing a child that may belong to a particular teacher. All team members offer suggestions on how that particular teacher can help and support that particular child especially if they have had similar experiences and they have implemented ideas or used certain resources that help their child become successful or show progress.

Speaker 1: In this particular meeting, those ideas will offer to a teacher who felt like they had tried everything and they had become frustrated because the student wasn't responding. Some ideas were shared. That particular teacher went back and implemented some of those ideas, used some of those materials and the student started to show signs of progress. It wasn't that the child could not learn. It was the fact that we needed to try different ways and use different materials to get the child to respond.

Speaker 1: That, to me, is what a successful problem solving and decision making team meeting, what that should consist of. Even though that wasn't their child, that child wasn't assigned to their homeroom, everyone that's at that table is responsible for sharing and coming up with creative ideas to implement things to make sure that that student is making adequate progress.

Mr. Mayes: Can you describe any team participants that stood out to you during this problem solving meeting and what made them stand out?

Speaker 1: Yeah, without calling any names, there was this one particular teacher who just kept asking questions. They were framing questions to their particular team member because they wanted to challenge their thinking. They wanted to make sure that this teacher was not operating out of frustration, and the questioning I thought was that of ensuring that the teacher was, again, exhausting all of their means and not giving up on the child and making sure that the teacher was being responsible and accountable before they I guess looked at moving the child to the next tier or recommending possible ESE services.

Speaker 1: This particular teacher I thought had a belief that all kids could learn, and with that, what made her stand out was that it wasn't just an administrator or a resource teacher in the room that was challenging that particular teacher's thinking, it was her own colleague. It was her peer. Again, that stood out to me.

Mr. Mayes: How were data utilized during this meeting?

Speaker 1: When discussing individual students, we always start with how they're performing in the core. We start with our common assessment data, which is usually given

quite frequently and it measures how students are performing on grade level standards, depending upon how they're responding to grade level assessments. We usually drill down, if there's a tier two intervention that's being implemented with that child, then that tier two data is also considered, but starting with tier one, we always want to analyze the data to determine what may be the cause of why this child is not performing on grade level.

Speaker 1: Conversations about that is usually the first round of conversations and, again, if other data is available, if there is tier two data available, that data is also discussed. If there's tier three data available, that data is also brought to the table as well. We bring in other sources of data, like attendance data, any referral data that might be available, and again, all of those things are considered. If the child is, again, a student that is learning the English language, we want to have a discussion about their language acquisition and where they are in that process and how that may be impacting or impeding their progress.

Speaker 1: We look at multiple sources of data during the meeting to make sure that we have a well-rounded view on the child and to know we're making an informed decision that's based on data and not emotions.

Mr. Mayes: Can you describe how the student's environmental factors influence your expectations with the student?

Speaker 1: I think it's, again, that's data in and of itself that is important when discussing any student. Environment effect, when I think of environment effect is I think of poverty, I think of support at home. I think of things that may be modeled for the

student, that may be norms for the student, that may not be conducive to the school setting, that may be taught first to the student so that we can help the student to know and understand what appropriate school behaviors are so that it does not impact their time in the classroom.

Speaker 1: To answer the question about how does it impact the expectations for the student, I don't think the expectations change. What may change from the environmental factors is considering what the factors are and how we need to support the student to help them meet the expectations of the school and of their individual grade level, but I don't think the expectations change from student to student.

Mr. Mayes: Okay. Can you give me an example of when you led a team through the problem solving process and the outcome was a challenge?

Speaker 1: Yes, that makes me think of my first grade team. On this team, we have some teachers that are fairly new to our school. We have a couple of veteran teachers and we have some teachers that have been teaching for less than three years. On this team, the conversations are I guess you can say surface level. The challenge with this team is to try to get them to think beyond data from the core and look deeply at what may be impacting the child's progress outside of academics sometimes. When we have a team that's inexperienced, I think it calls for a lot of direction that may be coming down from the administration, that may come from the MTSS resource teacher, and oftentimes, with this grade level, I think the capacity of the teachers hinders the process.

Speaker 1: There's a lot of training and knowledge, presentation that must go on with this team to get them to drill down to begin to target individual skills for students. That oftentimes poses the challenge when there's lack of experiences or maybe lack of success stories to share with individual teachers to help them to understand that it is possible. Just have to give it some time, you have to give students a chance because the mindset of teachers I feel is very important when dealing with struggling students. I feel once we're able to identify the root cause of why the child is not responding to intervention or instruction, I think that's the bulk of the battle, and then we can in turn align some type intervention or support to get over that hurdle with students, but the mindset of this particular grade level sometimes poses a challenge.

Speaker 1: There's a lot of conversation about a shift in that mindset with the instructional staff first before we can get down to what we need to do to meet the needs of those individual students that we're discussing in those meetings.

Mr. Mayes: Can you describe any key participants in this particular example that stood out to you? Can you also describe what made them stand out?

Speaker 1: Sure. In this particular meeting, it was a meeting, again, about an individual student, and the homeroom teacher could not really describe for the team what the issue was with the child. To me, I thought that the progress monitoring was lacking. Not sure if it was, again, the inexperience of the teacher, but the teacher struggled with identifying what the root cause that they felt was hindering the

child from making academic progress. With that, if the homeroom teaching is having a hard time identifying the root cause, it's hard for anyone to offer support.

Speaker 1: Therefore, in that particular situation, we needed to kind of table the discussion until one of my content coaches or the MTSS coach could go in and work with the child side by side with the teacher to help her identify some of the challenges that the student was facing in the classroom, whether it was misalignment of the instruction or inappropriate materials to help get down to the root cause. That held up that particular conversation for that particular student, and time is usually of the essence for some of our students who are struggling.

Mr. Mayes: How were data utilized during this meeting?

Speaker 1: Very similar to how we use data in the meeting that was successful. We usually start with how the child is performing in the core, and in this particular case where it was a challenge, the teacher was sharing verbally some of the data pieces that she had collected, but it was really no tangible student work samples that she could share with the team, so that the team could maybe identify and maybe in the child's responses, what the misconceptions were in their thinking so that we could dig a little deeper and see if we could align a targeted intervention or some support for the student.

Speaker 1: We kind of left off with knowing that the teacher herself needed some support, and that's what we did to help move that teacher along so that she would be again equipped to be able to speak with confidence about what she felt like or how she felt like her children were performing, so that again, the problem solving team

could help guide and direct her next steps, make recommendations for her next steps.

Mr. Mayes: Okay. Same question as the last, how does the student's environment affect or influence your expectations for the student in this regard?

Speaker 1: Very similar to the same. I don't think the expectations sway or change the grade level. Academic expectations are pretty much set by the state and the district. It is up to the instructional staff and support staff to give students what they need to meet those expectations.

Mr. Mayes: Then can you provide an example of when you had to lead the team through the problem solving process and the outcome was a disaster?

Speaker 1: Okay. One particular case sticks out to me, again, with this particular grade level. We were having a problem solving and decision making meeting about a particular student. The student was fairly new to us and we quickly started to realize that they were struggling, and usually the first thing we recommend when we get a new student is that once we receive the student's Cume Folder, that we review what's in the student's Cume Folder. Oftentimes, well I won't say oftentimes, but usually there may be some information in the Cume Folder that might help us to better understand why the student might be struggling.

Speaker 1: In this particular case, the teacher brought up a student who she felt like was having some major struggles. We spent quite a few minutes discussing the student and problem solving what we felt like the child may need going forward in terms of next steps, supports, interventions, so on and so forth. Then within that

particular meeting, either myself or the resource teacher just looked the child up in our Student Management system and realized that the student, again, was fairly new to our school. We had gotten to the point where we asked the question of the teacher, "Have you reviewed the child's Cume Folder," and the answer was, "No."

Speaker 1: In this particular meeting, again, we had to table the discussion because without having all the information, there was really no need to proceed. After having some time and going into the child's Cume Folder, we realized that the child was supposed to be wearing glasses, and the child had not been wearing glasses. In terms of disaster, I wouldn't necessarily say it was a disaster, but in terms of the time spent in the meeting discussing a student, if we had followed the process and going through the child's Cume Folder, we could have been spending that time figuring out ways to get the child glasses if they could not afford it and so on and so forth.

Speaker 1: In terms of time spent in discussing something that we could have been actually providing the solution for, I would consider that a disaster.

Mr. Mayes: Regarding key participants that stood out, can you describe what made the participant stand out in this case?

Speaker 1: Yeah, that particular teacher stood out, because it also let me know that as the building administrator, that we needed to do a better job of making sure when new students came into our school, as soon as we received their Cume Folders, we somehow figure out a way to initiate that teacher and getting into the Cume Folder and determining what's in it, what may be helpful to quickly understanding

the student that they're serving and what we need to do to continue to support that student.

Speaker 1: Again, there have been times where we've gone in a Cume Folder and realized that the child has been receiving tier two or even tier three interventions at their previous school, and here we are sometimes starting the process over. That particular teacher stood out, but it also helped me to understand that as a building leader and our resource teacher, to understand that it's very important that we help our instructional staff because school is busy. We need to help them with situations like this so that students don't fall through the cracks or we don't spend valuable time redoing certain things when these problem solving and decision making meetings have already taken place maybe at another school, and we can just kind of pick up where that school left off and continue to support the child at the level that they need.

Mr. Mayes: How were data utilized during this meeting?

Speaker 1: We didn't get too far with the data because of quickly realizing that we needed to do a little bit more research before we bring that student to the problem solving meeting, bring them to the table to discuss their progress. Data from the Cume folder was utilized to determine that there was a vision issue, which is considered an exclusionary factor that we needed to rule that out in terms of whether that's having an impact on the child's academic progress before we proceeded any further with adding any interventions or additional support. That helped us ... that

data in the Cume Folder helped us with making sure we knew what our next steps were before, again, looking at moving the child to the next tier in the process.

Mr. Mayes: Did the student's environmental factors influence your expectations for this student?

Speaker 1: Not so much the expectations, but definitely if you can't see, then you can't expect for the student to perform at their rate of progress. In terms of this particular student, I think it would have changed my expectations until we made sure the child got glasses or we moved the child closer or provided some supports in the classroom so that their vision was not a determining factor of how they would progress.

Mr. Mayes: How do you define a successful problem solving meeting?

Speaker 1: A successful problem solving meeting, I believe, again, is a meeting that we are brainstorming solutions to an identified problem that's occurring. The meeting begins with someone articulating, again, with confidence and utilizing data to help the problem solving team understand what the real problem is and then moving from understanding what the problem is to a solution oriented type of approach where the MTSS resource teacher kind of guides and facilitates the conversation around what we feel are the next steps to support a student and to ensure that that student is working to their ability level and they're marking adequate progress.

Speaker 1: The ultimate goal for every child is to continue to make progress at a rate where we're closing achievement gaps, where we're closing the gap between where

they're currently performing and where they should be performing, and when we're able to put supports and interventions in place that are successful and we can come back and speak to those interventions and supports and how they worked for that particular student in a setting where you have other teachers that are witnessing and that are hearing these successful stories, I personally think that helps build capacity in a school, that helps to strengthen belief systems about how all students can learn when provided the supports and interventions that are targeted to their needs.

Speaker 1: I think usually when we have meetings that, again, whether it is a child that's showing adequate progress or a child that's showing poor progress, and then we're being solution oriented and implementing the next steps but also keeping parents informed along the way.

Mr. Mayes: Awesome. Can you explain your referral process?

Speaker 1: Absolutely. Again, usually with our MTSS, we begin with the core and how students are responding with the core. Usually students that end up in the referral process, they've been having poor progress at each tier of support. We've gone from the core to adding additional supports and interventions to tier two, and we add another layer of intervention usually at the tier three level. After about a total between the tier two/tier three of about anywhere from 10 to 12 data points, again, not black and white but dependent upon how the child is responding, once we reach the tier three level and we're still having poor responses to instruction and

intervention, then we usually schedule a meeting with the parent and go over the data that has been collected.

Speaker 1: We invite our school social worker. We invite our school psychologist, the person who has provided the tier three intervention, if it's not the homeroom teacher that's also in the meeting, the parents, and our ESE teacher. We usually invite the ESE teacher, and we have a conversation about the data that we've collected. Usually in that meeting is when we recommend that we obtain consent to evaluate the student for psychological evaluation to collect more data to determine if the child qualifies for ESE services. That's usually how the meeting flows, but it's very important that you begin this conversation when you first realize that the child is struggling.

Speaker 1: You bring that parent in on the conversation, so once you get to this point in the process, the parent has been well aware of how the student has been responding along the way and at this point is well informed about the process and possible ESE services as well. That's usually how our referral process, how we want it to go, but there are times when parents initiate the process as well, and by law we have to honor the parents request, but again, MTSS data is being collected at all times, so wherever or whomever initiates that process, the MTSS data weighs heavily on the decision making.

Mr. Mayes: Okay. Last question here. Is there anything else that you'd like to share that you did not share through my prompting and questioning about your role,

responsibilities and/or experiences as a resource teacher or an educator who leads MTSS implementation at your school?

Speaker 1: I just think it's very important that as the building leader that we do our best to make sure teachers understand that MTSS is not a referral process. It is a proactive process where we seek to implement supports and interventions to make sure students are performing at grade level. It's not a wait to fail process. Once you see a student struggling, we should be intervening. We should be responding. Based on how students are responding to what we're doing, we seek, again, new and creative ways to reach that student, to get them to respond adequately. I think that's one of the most important things is that it's not a referral process.

Speaker 1: Secondly, I think it's important to know that behavior and also environmental factors does impact a child's rate of progress, and those considerations need to be part of the conversation, and we should not solely make decisions centered on sole academic data. We need to look at other factors that may be impeding and provide some interventions for those situations as well to determine with confidence whether or not a child needs ESE services or should be referred for evaluations to determine if ESE services are needed.

Speaker 1: Those are two things that I would like to add to the conversation and hopefully with that, well I'll add a third. There's a third. Frequent and consistent meetings with the MTSS teams to make sure that the follow-up with interventions are happening with fidelity. Follow-up with teachers and parents is very important. Making sure that there's a process in place where you can monitor those

interventions that are put in place, and making sure that teachers are supported to make sure those interventions are being implemented with fidelity.

Mr. Mayes: All right. Awesome. I have no other questions. Thank you so much.

Speaker 1: Thank you so much Mr. [Mayes 00:48:02]. I appreciate your help today sir.

Mr. Mayes: You're welcome. You're welcome.

Speaker 1: All right.

APPENDIX D: RESOURCE TEACHERS' INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Resource teachers' Interview Questions

Participant's Overall Experiences

1. Tell me about yourself and your educational experiences.

Participant's Belief and Experiences

1. How has these experiences prepared you for the role as Resource Teacher who is responsible for leading MTSS.

Description of MTSS Implementation

1. Describe MTSS implementation at your school.
2. How do you understand your role and responsibilities of a Resource Teacher who leads MTSS implementation in your school?

Description of Problem Solving and Decision Making Processes

1. Give me an example of when you had to lead a team through the problem solving process and the outcome was successful. Give me an example of when you had to lead a team through the problem solving process and the outcome was a challenge. Give me an example of when you had to lead a team through the problem solving process and the outcome was a disaster.
 - a. Describe any team participants that stood out to you during this problem-solving meeting. What made them stand out?
 - b. How were data utilized during this meeting?
 - c. How does the student's environmental factors influence your expectations for the Student (s)?
2. How do you define a successful problem-solving meeting?
3. Explain your referral process.

Conclusion

1. Is there anything else that you would like to share that you did not share through my prompting and questioning about your role, responsibilities, and/or experiences as a Resource Teacher who leads MTSS implementation at your school?

APPENDIX E: ORGANIZING THEMES

Organizing Units of Relevant Meaning (Step Four of Colaizzi's Seven-Step Process)

Describing Components of Meaning (Colaizzi Step 3)	Organizing Units of Relevant Meaning (Colaizzi Step 4)
advocating for students even when parents are the most forthcoming	accountability
Every child is in monitored through the MTSS process	accountability
helping teachers own the process	accountability
lack of team consensus and accountability	accountability
responsible for all students receiving needed support	accountability
who should progress monitor the students, intervention teacher or homeroom teacher	accountability
teacher accountability and knowing the whole child	accountability
lack of team consensus	accountability
504 plans versus referrals for evaluations	appropriate level of support
computer intervention versus face time with the teacher	appropriate level of support
decision making	appropriate level of support
English Language Learners and assumptions	appropriate level of support
focus needs to be on problem solving cycle	appropriate level of support
including for how gifted students ae being serviced	
need to define progress and when the intervention is working	appropriate level of support
small groups are a focus and matching schedules and materials with student needs	appropriate level of support
teachers who never refer can be a concern	appropriate level of support
4th and 5th grade teachers having difficulty proving appropriate levels of support	appropriate levels of support
accountability	
consensus	appropriate levels of support
environment determines teacher expectations	appropriate levels of support
environmental factors	appropriate levels of support
First conversation centers on instruction	appropriate levels of support
have a paraprofessional to support her implementation	appropriate levels of support
lack of focus on the behavior needs	appropriate levels of support
lack of parental involvement	appropriate levels of support
lack of resources to fully meet the needs of the students	appropriate levels of support

mindset that placement in ESE was a challenge	appropriate levels of support
organizing resources to match the students' needs	appropriate levels of support
prevention mindset	appropriate levels of support
additional pieces of data other than computer based programs	assessment practices
analyzing data to make informed decisions	assessment practices
Computer versus face time with the teacher	assessment practices
decision making and problem solving	assessment practices
focus on i-Ready because that is what administrators focus on	assessment practices
importance of progress monitoring	assessment practices
importance of using data to make decisions	assessment practices
multiple measures	assessment practices
operating with a sense of urgency	assessment practices
parent request an evaluation through doctor's orders but school data didn't show a need	assessment practices
philosophies clash	assessment practices
understanding whole school needs and analyzing the data accordingly	assessment practices
using data to establish buy in	assessment practices
example of a successful problem solving meeting	collaboration
importance communication and establishing working relationships	collaboration
referral process involves the school psychologist	collaboration
success equals students intervention has had a positive impact	collaboration
having an understanding and compassion involving the parent	communication and collaboration
parent involvement in the initial stages as a member of the team	communication and collaboration
speaking the same language and coming to consensus	communication and collaboration
parent lack of awareness	communication and collaboration
Regular meetings with parents of struggling students to determine if interventions are effective	communication and collaboration
parent request meeting and meeting with parents was scheduled	communication and collaboration

personal experiences help to shape the prevention mindset	credibility and trust
teaching experience is critical in leading MTSS implementation	credibility and trust
Understanding child development and how to recognize skill deficiencies is an important skill of an MTSS resource teacher	credibility and trust
mindset and beliefs	cultural awareness
social/emotional and behavioral considerations	cultural awareness
Awareness and experience of new teachers	cultural awareness
other factors to be considered	cultural awareness
mindset and beliefs	Expectations
data driven meetings that happen a few times a year and attempts to meet the needs	fidelity of process
lack of early intervention	fidelity of process
Meet 2-3 times a year, monitor for progress or lack of, meet with psychologist, the two of us make a decision	fidelity of process
meet every nine weeks to make adjustments and adjustments can be made by teacher whenever the need for data support change	fidelity of process
variability of implementation depending on grade level	fidelity of process
implementation fidelity may lead to frustration	frustration
Modeling the process to minimize the frustration with the time that it takes	Frustration
comfort level for 4th and 5th grade teachers particularly most struggling students	implementation fidelity
Continuous cycle	implementation fidelity
culture of trust and willingness	implementation fidelity
data analysis to determine next steps and communication to teachers	implementation fidelity
discomfort	implementation fidelity
drilling down to ensure fidelity is happening at all tiers	implementation fidelity
ESE scheduling as a conflict to implementation fidelity	implementation fidelity
frequency of meetings to determine progress	implementation fidelity
importance of reteaching and small group instruction	implementation fidelity
lack of monitoring and lack of knowledge from teachers	implementation fidelity

made a checklist to help teachers understand the process more and the data collection and documentation required	implementation fidelity
multiple measures	implementation fidelity
need for more human support	implementation fidelity
organizing resources to meet the needs of students	implementation fidelity
prevention-based mindset shifting	implementation fidelity
problem solving success due to positive mindset of teacher and preparation	implementation fidelity
referral process	implementation fidelity
Role of MTSS resource teacher	implementation fidelity
starts the referral process	implementation fidelity
succeeds leading to buy-in	implementation fidelity
successful problem solving meeting	implementation fidelity
teacher lacked knowledge and understanding of next steps and therefore did not implement next steps	implementation fidelity
team decision making and problem solving	implementation fidelity
understanding the importance of the process and how it fits into the everyday work	implementation fidelity
using data to demonstrate success	implementation fidelity
we don't have a referral process, teachers email when they have a concern	implementation fidelity
determining skill deficiencies	individual decision making
MTSS resource teacher individually uses data to determine if student should be tested	individual decision making
decision making	intervention
early intervention and strong tier 2 structures	intervention
Retention in lower grades	intervention
successful classroom change as an intervention	intervention
difficult to teach and meet the needs of varied abilities	organizing resources
organizing resources to meet the needs of students	organizing resources
environmental factors can affect how a child learns	prevention based practices
helping teachers to understand the significance of the process and helping them to manage their time to get the work done	prevention-based mindset
Modeling and mindset shifting	prevention-based mindset
district adjustments that helped with the mindset shift	prevention-based practices

meetings are not scheduled unless all components of the checklist are considered
I'm responsible for tier 3
role is focusing on struggling students
alignment of data and graphs
figuring out how to remove barriers of learning is the gist of my role
communication with teachers and parents
ensuring parent communication
I make sure fidelity of implementation takes place with the students I'm involved with
individual decision making
begin with students that are requiring more support
tiering of all students

lack of time to devote to the MTSS process
Lower grades I try to meet with the teacher, everybody else I initiate for sake of time
multiple roles and responsibilities
there's a lot to manage and not enough time
time to meet makes the process comprehensive but time is a challenge
analyzing the data to group tier students
formulating groups at the beginning of the year and late arriving students
opportunity for training or professional development with structuring small groups
Start with team, individual meetings with parent and teacher, progress monitor for as long as it takes
team decision making and accountability for all students
supporting teachers through the process
teacher had deficient skills to teach phonics
importance of on going progress monitoring and documentation
diversified experience
philosophies clashing
respect and credibility of the MTSS resource teacher

prevention-based practices

role of resource teacher
role of resource teacher
role of resource teacher
role of resource teacher

role of resource teacher
role of resource teacher
role of resource teacher

role of resource teacher
role of resource teacher

shared decision making

role of resource teacher
role of resource teacher

role of resource teacher
role of resource teacher
role of resource teacher

shared decision making
shared decision making

shared decision making

shared decision making

shared decision making

training and support
training and support
transition practices

trust and credibility
trust and credibility
trust and credibility

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