

PARENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH DATA AND DECISION-MAKING IN A RESPONSE
TO INTERVENTION PROCESS

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2012

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To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, David and Andrea Craft, for supporting me and challenging me throughout my life to become a stronger student and better person. I have no doubt that this process would have been exceedingly more difficult without their constant encouragement, words of wisdom, and consolation. Words cannot express the eternal gratitude I have for them and the sacrifices they have made so that I could be able to pursue my dreams.

I am grateful for my chairperson, Dr. Nancy Waldron. I appreciate her collaborative spirit and experienced advice as I conducted my first qualitative research study, as well as her support for my endeavors throughout my graduate school career. I would also like to thank Dr. Diana Joyce for her willingness to help me in every way and for her positive demeanor. In addition, I am very appreciative of my other committee members for their time and effort: Dr. Patricia Ashton, Dr. Maria Denney, and Dr. Lynda Hayes. Their unique knowledge and expertise were invaluable to this process.

This study would not have been possible without meaningful contribution from the participants. The parents, teachers, and support staff allowed me to take a peek into their lives, and I am very grateful for their willingness to guide this study. The information that I gleaned from them has certainly informed my own professional practices, and I am thankful that I had the opportunity to work with such helpful and accommodating people during this time-intensive process.

I would not have been able to persist through graduate school without my family and friends with whom I've been blessed. I would like to thank my sisters, Mallory Daniels and Mary Beth Staude. Both have always supported and cheered me on. From a young age, Mallory has given me confidence to work hard and has pushed me to do

my best through being my natural-born competition and trusted confidant. I am also grateful for some of my best friends: Peta Niehaus, Lane Baldwin, Nicole Wyse, Leah Johnston, and Lindsey Herndon. These women challenge me to love everyone I meet and to always show compassion, which are skills that will be invaluable in my life. In addition, I am very thankful for Garrett Astary. I appreciate his ability to lighten my mood and build me up, and for lending me a shoulder to cry on when I need it. Garrett has always encouraged me, even during my most challenging moments, and has been a constant source of strength during the chaos of graduate school. Finally, I want to thank the members of my cohort who have been in Gainesville for as long as I have: Cathy Pasia, Jenny Heretick, Stacey Rice, Sally Moore, Katrina Moore, and Suzie Long. I cannot imagine going through graduate school with better people.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

PARENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH DATA AND DECISION-MAKING IN A RESPONSE
TO INTERVENTION PROCESS

By

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August 2012

Chair: Nancy Waldron
Major: School Psychology

This qualitative research study investigated patterns of parental understanding and participation in an elementary school Response to Intervention (RtI) process. More specifically, this study examined the ways in which parents developed an understanding of their children's academic progress information as well as the ways in which parents participated in educational decision-making for their children. In addition, the roles that teachers and other support personnel at the school played in parents' understanding and participation in decision-making were explored.

Qualitative methodology was used to gain a deep, meaningful understanding of parents' perceptions about their children's data, the ways in which they construct their role as decision-makers, and their experiences and impressions from engaging with school personnel during the RtI process. To obtain this rich information, data was collected over a 5-month period through individual interviews, observations, and review of relevant documents. Data analysis included coding, creating categories from the codes, finding patterns, and identifying and labeling themes.

Data analysis produced four major themes regarding the ways in which parents develop an understanding of their children's academic progress information: 1) diverse

and numerous opportunities to make sense of their child's progress; 2) reliance on joint examination of the data; 3) establishing a close, trusting relationship with their child's teacher; and 4) realizing the "whole picture" of their child. In terms of parent participation in decision-making for their children, three interactive and connected themes were revealed: 1) determining their level of involvement based on the intensity of their child's needs; 2) experiences within the parent-teacher dyad; and 3) interacting with existing components of the school system. In addition to these major themes, parents' unmet needs are discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research are offered.

CHAPTER 1 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Nature of the Problem

The roles of parents in their child's education are constantly evolving. Over time, parents have moved past fulfilling basic obligations to becoming more directly involved in their child's education through making educational decisions, being advocates, and supporting learning at home (Henderson & Berla, 1994). This expansion of roles is not surprising, as researchers have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of parental involvement in their child's education (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Dyson, 2001; Mundschenk & Foley, 1994). Benefits include increased levels of student academic motivation and achievement (Norris, 1999; Watkins, 1997) as well as the establishment of a trusting relationship between the school and home (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Steere, Pancsofar, Wood, & Hecimovic, 1990). In addition, parents who participate in their child's education have a higher level of satisfaction with the educational decision-making process (Stancin, Reuter, Dunn, & Bickett, 1984) and more effective problem-solving strategies (Newmann & Wehage, 1995). However, despite the benefits of involving parents in their child's education, schools still experience difficulties with facilitating parent participation in meaningful ways (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). In fact, researchers assert that current practice emphasizes "more rhetoric than action" when constructing opportunities for parental involvement (Reschly, Coolong-Chaffin, Christenson, & Gutkin, 2007, p. 148).

Communication and decision-making are two important roles that parents often take on (Epstein, 2005). Various research studies have examined parents' understanding about academic progress information they receive from their child's

school (i.e., home-school communication) (Brantlinger, 1987; Harniss, Epstein, Bursuck, Nelson, & Jayanthi, 2001; Harry, 1992; Waltman & Frisbie, 1994) and parent participation during educational decision-making (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Harry, 1992; McNamara, Telzrow, & DeLamatre, 1999; Vaughn, 1988). However, few studies to date have examined such roles of parental involvement within Response to Intervention (Rtl) processes. Rtl is designed to not only improve instruction and intervention for students, but also enhance parental involvement. However, since procedures associated with Rtl are newly implemented in schools, it is important for researchers to investigate how parents understand and participate in these new processes.

The following literature review examines the traditional ways in which schools interact with parents through two methods: the information that is provided to parents regarding their child's academic progress and the ways in which parents are involved in educational decision-making for their child. For this study, these topics were examined in light of Rtl implementation. Therefore, topics related to Rtl were also examined, including components of Rtl that facilitate parental understanding and involvement, the alignment of these components with legal documents and policy initiatives, and ways that Rtl processes can improve upon current parental involvement practices.

This study examined various aspects of parental understanding and involvement within Rtl processes, thus the literature review begins with a description of Rtl. This includes an explanation of core components of Rtl, available roles for parents within Rtl processes, and challenges to including parents in Rtl. Then, the political and legal rationale for implementing Rtl is discussed. In particular, this section analyzes the No

Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) policies with regards to what these federal laws describe as ideal parental involvement practices. Next, actual parental involvement practices are described. In particular, this includes a summary of research about traditional patterns of home-school communication and parental participation in educational decision-making. In the final section, a rationale for parental involvement in Rtl is provided.

Following the literature review, the research methodology for the study is explained. This includes a description of the setting and participants, as well as the data collection procedures and analysis methods. In addition, methodological issues are discussed and a researcher subjectivity statement is provided.

Description of Response to Intervention (Rtl)

Response to Intervention (Rtl) is a multi-tiered service delivery method that is currently being implemented in public schools. The primary goal for an Rtl approach is to improve instruction for all students, and secondarily, to replace the traditional “refer-test-place” model of disability identification in the school system (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In achieving these goals, the Rtl process might look different from school to school, district to district, and state to state; however, several core components are generally included in an Rtl process. Implementation of Rtl processes will ideally address limitations of current practices, including enhancing parental involvement within the school system (Reschly et al., 2007).

Effective Rtl processes include several core components, such as high quality, research-based instruction in the general education setting (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; Mellard & Johnson, 2007), multi-tiered intervention with increasing intensity based on student need (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Mellard & Johnson,

2007), and a focus on prevention and early intervention efforts (Mellard & Johnson, 2007; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007) paired with early identification of learning difficulties (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Furthermore, instruction and interventions are evaluated to measure fidelity of implementation (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; Mellard & Johnson, 2007). In addition, RtI processes emphasize the importance of data to drive educational decision-making, including continuous monitoring of academic progress to assist in determining instructional modifications and identification if necessary (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007), as well as collaborative problem-solving efforts between school staff and parents (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007).

To improve instruction for all students, RtI highlights the necessity of providing research-based instruction in the general education setting, as well as more intensive, research-based intervention for students who require additional instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; Mellard & Johnson, 2007). Schools are required “to use scientific knowledge to guide selection of core curricula” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 94) so that the academic needs of the majority of the student population are met by the core curriculum in the general education classroom. Furthermore, research methodology is used to inform the choice of multi-tiered intervention strategies. That is, “multiple tiers of increasingly intensive interventions are directed at correspondingly smaller and smaller population segments” (Mellard & Johnson, 2007, p. 3). More targeted, small-group interventions should be implemented with only “15% to 20% of the student population...[with] approximately 5% of the student population requiring such an intensive data collection and analysis procedure”

(Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007, pp. 4-5). Therefore, if the core curriculum is effective, only a small proportion of the total student population should receive the most individualized and intensive instructional intervention. The focus on successful core instruction emphasizes the importance of prevention/early intervention and early identification, which are key features of RtI (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Mellard & Johnson, 2007; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007).

While instruction is occurring, data are collected, both on student progress as well as intervention implementation integrity (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; Mellard & Johnson, 2007; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007). Throughout multi-tiered instruction, students' academic progress is monitored to determine effectiveness of the instruction they receive and student responsiveness to intervention. This includes both universal screening of academic difficulties for all students as well as progress monitoring of students receiving tiered intervention. Collecting such data assists teachers in determining if students are meeting the expected standards, as well as guides them in modifying instruction to better meet student needs (Mellard & Johnson, 2007). In addition, intervention implementation is assessed so that the RtI process can be enhanced and intervention outcomes can be systematically linked to intervention implementation (Mellard & Johnson, 2007).

A final core component of an effective RtI approach is collaborative problem-solving. Researchers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007) suggest that problem-solving efforts should include teachers, other school staff involved with the student, and the student's parents. Collaboration among individuals with

various areas of expertise helps to ensure that the student is receiving the most appropriate services in a timely manner. In addition, the goal of involving the parents in all stages of the problem-solving process is “to help the teacher select, implement, and monitor the effectiveness of an intervention” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 94). That is, school-based professionals and parents become familiar with the stages of problem-solving: problem identification, problem analysis, intervention planning and implementation, and plan evaluation. Pairing this systematic process with reliance on data to guide educational decision-making should lead to the most effective decision for the student (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Rtl and the Roles of Parents

The 2004 Learning Disabilities Roundtable Coalition indicated that “documentation of parent involvement throughout the [Rtl] process” is a major component of Rtl (Klotz & Canter, 2006). In fact, Reschly and colleagues (2007) proposed that “parents are necessary, not optional, in a well-conceived application of Rtl” (p. 153). The following section is a commentary on what roles researchers expect parents to take on during Rtl processes. While these perspectives and opinions are based on the body of literature addressing parent involvement, studies have not yet been conducted on parental involvement within Rtl. Utilizing the core components of the Rtl process can lead to several benefits related to parental involvement in their child’s schooling. First, parents can gain a more comprehensive understanding of their child’s academic skills based on the information they receive throughout the Rtl process. Second, Rtl’s focus on a process from early intervention through evaluation of intervention integrity allows parents to be involved throughout the entire educational decision-making process for their child. Third, the problem-solving feature of Rtl points to the importance of

professional training related to home-school collaboration efforts. All of these key features can have a positive impact on parental involvement in their child's education.

Rtl processes focus on collecting functional, instructional data related to a student's performance in their academic environment. The information collected "emphasizes teachable skills related to the curriculum that informs decision-makers about what to teach and how to teach it" (Gresham, 2007, p. 20). Data frequently includes curriculum-based measurements, which are collection procedures based on classroom's instructional materials (Deno, 2003). Consequently, the data carry significant value for improving instruction, which often times is not indicated by traditional evaluations (Gresham, 2007; Klotz & Canter, 2006; Reschly et al., 2007). By continuously collecting information about a student's progress in the academic environment, everyone involved in the Rtl process gains a better understanding of the student's current level of performance as well as rate of progress compared to other students in the class (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Parents are included in the process and receive comprehensive data on their child, which can assist them in becoming informed about the instruction their child is receiving as well as academic progress. Overall, the use of data examined by the entire decision-making team, not hunches or professional guesswork, drives the educational decisions in Rtl (Gresham, 2007).

Given that Rtl emphasizes practices to prevent academic difficulties (e.g., high-quality core instruction, universal screening and progress monitoring) as well as early intervention (e.g., multi-tiered intervention, data-driven decision-making), parents have an opportunity to become involved early in their child's education (Reschly et al., 2007). Additionally, decision-making teams, which include parents, examine all student data

and implementation integrity while intervention is occurring, therefore parents have an opportunity to play a strong role throughout the entire decision-making process (Gresham, 2007).

Finally, Rtl processes emphasize the necessity of collaboration efforts between the home and school environments (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007). For school staff, this can lead to professional development opportunities surrounding effective home-school communication and strategies to involve parents in their child's education at school. Professional development might also focus on communicating student data. For parents, collaboration efforts include being informed about a child's academic performance, becoming involved in educational decision-making, and seeking opportunities to become involved in their child's education at home and school.

Although benefits for parents exist throughout Rtl processes, challenges also occur. Some parents do not know how to seek out or access information related to Rtl processes (Klotz & Canter, 2006). In addition, even if provided with such information, their understanding may be limited. Or, parents may feel that their child's education is the responsibility of the school, and may not want or know how to evaluate effectiveness of instruction. Furthermore, it can be challenging for parents to understand their rights as outlined by regulations and guidelines, which includes a timeline of the Rtl process as well as the ability to request an evaluation for special education services (Klotz & Canter, 2006). It is essential that these challenges be addressed throughout Rtl implementation so that schools can most effectively meet the needs of parents.

Political and Legal Rationale for Rtl

The rationale behind Rtl has been driven by legal and political forces. The 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the 2004 reauthorization of the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have spurred the usage of Rtl as a primary service delivery method in school systems. Both NCLB and IDEA promote the use of service delivery methods that provide universal screening of academic difficulties, progress monitoring for students at-risk, and multi-tiered interventions based on a student's responsiveness to instruction, which are major components of Rtl (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). IDEA also allows for better provision of early intervention services for at-risk students, which has an effect on how instruction is delivered, where it is delivered, and who delivers it, which are also elements of Rtl (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

The Relationship Between Political/Legal Initiatives and Rtl

NCLB is a federal policy initiative that primarily focuses on increasing student achievement through system-wide accountability and high-quality instruction (NCLB, 2001). Core components of Rtl that align with the goals of NCLB include prevention and early intervention for academic difficulties (U.S. Department of Education, 2003), use of scientifically-based research (Cortiella, 2006), and accountability efforts (Mellard & Johnson, 2007). Within Rtl, this means that all students are screened for academic difficulties, and those who are experiencing difficulties receive intervention supports to increase their achievement. In addition, students' academic progress is monitored (Mellard & Johnson, 2007). Furthermore, use of research-based practices is required in the general education classroom as well as during tiered interventions so that students make progress toward grade-level benchmarks (Cortiella, 2006; Mellard & Johnson, 2007). Within Rtl processes, high-quality instruction is closely linked to frequent assessment of student progress to ensure that students are making progress toward state standards. That is, "Rtl has clear parallels to these [NCLB] goals with its own

goals for high student achievement and the alignment of instruction, interventions, and assessment to promote student learning” (Mellard & Johnson, 2007, p. 17).

IDEA is the federal law that assists in serving individuals with disabilities, ages 3-21, throughout their education (IDEA, 2004). Core components of RtI that align with practices mandated by IDEA include early intervention services, alternative processes for identifying and documenting a disability, data collection, and the use of scientifically-based research for students with disabilities through the general curriculum (Cortiella, 2006; Mellard & Johnson, 2007). For students with disabilities, this includes access to the general education curriculum, which is required to be research-based. This also means that students’ academic progress is monitored frequently and consistently within the general curriculum. In addition, an individualized education program (IEP) should be created for each student with a disability (Cortiella, 2006). According to IDEA, IEPs are to be created by collaborative problem-solving teams and should outline student goals, a description of their instruction and interventions, and document the student’s academic progress within the curriculum (Mellard & Johnson, 2007).

NCLB, IDEA, and Parental Involvement

To conduct an analysis of the relationship between NCLB, IDEA, and parental involvement, several sources were reviewed (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Cortiella, 2006; Deno, 2003; Epstein, 2005; Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008; IDEA, 2004; Landsverk, 2004; NCLB, 2002; Reschly et al., 2007; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). The primary sources that guided this analysis were documents created to help parents understand the meaning and requirements of the aforementioned policies (Cortiella, 2006; Epstein,

2005; Landsverk, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005).

Both NCLB and IDEA can impact the ways that parents interact with schools, especially parents of children receiving intervention. At the intersection of these initiatives are: the involvement of parents from early on in their child's education to evaluation of educational decisions (U.S. Department of Education, 2003); the delivery of comprehensive information regarding the general education curriculum, the assessment process, and state standards (Landsverk, 2004; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005); ongoing home-school communication regarding student academic progress (Epstein, 2005; Landsverk, 2004; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005); collaboration during educational decision-making; parent training (Landsverk, 2004; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005); and professional development regarding parental involvement in schools (Landsverk, 2004; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). All of the aforementioned requirements of NCLB and IDEA align well with RtI processes and will be explained more fully in the following sections.

Early and Continued Involvement

Requirements of NCLB and IDEA work to ensure that parents are involved in their child's education from beginning to end. This includes receiving basic information about the classroom curriculum to giving consent for an evaluation to evaluating the student's educational program (Epstein, 2005; IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2002). While not all parents will need to participate in a comprehensive evaluation for their child, they will be provided with useful information regarding their child's strengths and weaknesses as early as possible so that their involvement can begin early (U.S. Department of

Education, 2003). In relation to Rtl, this will include various types of information regarding their child's academic performance, including strengths and difficulties. In particular, researchers suggest that "the focus on screening, early intervention, and progress monitoring provide an opportunity for active parent engagement and partnering between family and school personnel much earlier in the development and identification of a student's academic or behavioral difficulty" (Reschly et al, 2007, p. 153).

Although it is expected that all parents receive information regarding the general curriculum, assessment processes and state standards, not all parents will necessarily need to give consent for an evaluation. However, in the event that a child does not respond adequately to intensive interventions, "the public agency must make reasonable efforts to obtain the informed consent from the parent for an initial evaluation to determine whether the child is a child with a disability" (IDEA, 2004). Therefore, parental involvement is maintained throughout the educational decision-making process, especially for parents of students receiving intervention.

Delivery of Comprehensive Information

As mentioned, NCLB requires that all parents be informed about the general education curriculum of their child's classroom as well as basic assessment information. Utilizing Rtl processes, all parents will be able to receive information about the academic material their child is learning, as well as the ways in which their child's skills are being assessed (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Furthermore, Rtl processes enhance the ease with which assessment processes and expected proficiency levels can be explained. This is because much of the assessment information is tied to their child's curriculum (i.e., curriculum-based measurement); so, teaching them about the

curriculum along with the assessment tools tied to it will likely enhance parental understanding of the curriculum-assessment link (Landsverk, 2004). Doing so assists in joint monitoring (at school and home) of student academic progress as well as maximized student learning time by informing parents of the curriculum and their child's unique needs (Reschly et al., 2007). In addition, it is expected that the provision of such information will encourage parents to become involved in their child's interventions in the home environment as well as at school (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). Parents are encouraged to participate, using the information gained from the school and their child's teacher, in intervention strategies at home (Reschly et al., 2007). Furthermore, curriculum-based standards that the child is expected to meet can be easily explained in graphic format (Deno, 2003). Providing parents with a visual representation of expected standards in comparison to student achievement will likely assist them in better understanding the state's academic expectations (Deno, 2003).

Parents are also encouraged to remain involved throughout the evaluation of their child's educational program (NCLB, 2002). Schools should maximize opportunities for parent participation (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). In particular, within Rtl processes, parents can be informed, contributing participants within the collaborative problem-solving team. Therefore, they will be better able to help evaluate their child's educational program since they have received basic information regarding the curriculum, the assessment process, and expected standards (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005).

Ongoing Home-School Communication

NCLB and IDEA require that teachers communicate frequently and in understandable formats with parents regarding their child's academic progress (Epstein, 2005). NCLB states that the parent-teacher compact should:

address the importance of communication between teachers and parents on an ongoing basis through, at a minimum—parent-teacher conferences..., frequent reports to parents on their children's progress; and reasonable access to staff (NCLB, 2002)

NCLB requires that strong home-school communication practices occur, in written and face-to-face formats. The home-school link should be a strong one, as parents are supposed to receive comprehensive information about their child in a method and language that they can understand (Epstein, 2005). Furthermore, IDEA requires that "each participating agency must permit parents to inspect and review any education records relating to their children that are collected, maintained, or used by the agency under this part. The agency must comply with a request without unnecessary delay and before any meeting regarding an IEP" (IDEA, 2004). In other words, schools are required to provide parents with all information related to their child's education. Within RtI processes, this includes universal screening information, curriculum-based measurements, and progress monitoring data. According to NCLB, schools must provide this information on a regular and continuous basis, so assessment should be dynamic and ongoing (NCLB, 2002; Reschly et al., 2007). However, the school's responsibility does not stop at solely providing the information. School staff must be reasonably available to meet with parents to further clarify the information and to address parents' questions or concerns (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). In terms of children who are receiving intensive intervention and may require an

IEP, parents must be provided with such information before the IEP process begins (IDEA, 2004). Such requirements have several implications for Rtl processes, including the ways in which schools communicate with parents and are informed about their child's progress (Epstein, 2005; IDEA, 2004; Landsverk, 2004).

Collaboration

It is the school's responsibility to provide parents with comprehensive information about their child's education as early as possible and to facilitate their involvement in educational decision-making (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). In fact, NCLB and IDEA require that parents be afforded the opportunity to be a part of all educational decisions made about their child (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008). Although NCLB does not define "appropriate" participation, IDEA requires that parents have the opportunity to be a collaborative, participating member at any meeting involving their child's education (Cortiella, 2006). NCLB further explains that the school must make a satisfactory effort to involve the parents in educational decision-making, which can include altering the meeting time, place, or method (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). If the parents do not wish to be involved, then schools must document their efforts to ensure that they attempted to involve parents as best as possible (NCLB, 2002).

These regulations closely relate to the collaborative problem-solving component of Rtl processes. Within Rtl, NCLB and IDEA regulations would require that parents be equal and participating members of the problem-solving team for their child. While this includes the provision of information regarding the classroom curriculum and academic progress, it also includes the ability to evaluate and make suggestions regarding their child's educational services (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). With valuable information

provided to them by the school paired with their own experiences with the child at home, parents should be seen as a valuable contributor within the Rtl process. They should have the ability to be a part of the collaborative problem-solving team in whatever capacity they prefer, from receiving information to participating in interventions to evaluating intervention effectiveness (Burns & Gibbons, 2008).

Parent Training and Professional Development

Components of NCLB also have major implications for building knowledge and skill capacities of those involved in a student's education (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). This includes both parent training and professional development activities for school-based professionals in areas such as home-school communication, strategies for increasing student achievement, and the importance of collaboration.

These requirements could have many implications within an Rtl framework. Such practical applications include a variety of parent training opportunities to enhance understanding of the school environment and policies (Landsverk, 2004), allocating resources to increase parental participation (Epstein, 2005), and training school staff to work more collaboratively during the problem-solving process (Landsverk, 2004). In terms of parent training, NCLB indicates that this can come in the form of the school delivering information to parents as well as parents training other parents, as in the case of a parent advisory council (Landsverk, 2004; NCLB, 2002). The goal of such training is to ensure parental understanding of a variety of information, such as state standards, assessment methods, and how to enhance student academic achievement at home and to enhance home-school collaboration so that intervention begins early and is ongoing (NCLB, 2002). Similarly, professional development activities are mandated for school

staff by NCLB. This is required for many reasons: so that school-based professionals are informed of the value of parents and their contributions to their child's education, so they can learn how to reach out to parents as partners in education, and so that the importance of home-school ties is emphasized (NCLB, 2002). Within an Rtl framework, this centers around the notion of collaboration within a problem-solving team. By enhancing the skills of participants from the school and home environments, it is expected that all parties will feel a sense of involvement and responsibility for the student's education, which will in turn increase the likelihood that the interventions will promote positive outcomes for the student (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008).

Traditional Parental Involvement Practices

It is apparent from the analysis of NCLB and IDEA that, ideally, parents are afforded the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of roles throughout their child's education. However, this analysis depicted regulatory expectations of ideal parent participation. Researchers suggest that parents may not want or are unable to be involved in their child's education in every role possible for a variety of reasons (Fish, 2008; Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, & Curry, 1980; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). However, over time, two roles have been emphasized within the parental involvement literature as important to influencing educational outcomes and enhancing home-school collaboration. Those roles are communicator and decision-maker (Epstein, 2005; Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998). Home-school communication and participation in educational decision-making have been deemed consistently as important ways for parents to participate in their child's education (Abrahamson, Wilson, Yoshida, & Haggerty, 1983; Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education, 2010; Christenson, 2010; Fish, 2008) and will be the foci of the following sections.

The communicator role is described as parents participating in two-way communication about their child's academic progress and, more broadly, school events (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). This includes understanding information about their child's educational program, being aware of their child's academic progress, assisting in problem-solving about their child's challenges, and interacting effectively with school staff (Partnership Center for the Social Organization of Schools, n.d.). The decision-maker role is described as participating in decision-making for their child as well as becoming more involved at the systems level as a parent advocate (Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998). While both of these roles have implications for parents at the individual (their child) level and systems (school-wide) level, only the roles that relate particularly to their child will be examined. The following sections describe actual, traditional practices of the aforementioned roles as examined by researchers.

Traditional Home-School Communication Practices

An important aspect of parental involvement is home-school communication, defined as the provision of information to parents about their child's academic progress, which aids in informed educational decision-making (Sileo, Rude, & Luckner, 1988; Steere et al., 1990). Advantages of home-school communication are improved student transitions to the next grade level (Greenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001) and enhanced parent and student advocacy skills (Alper, Schloss, & Schloss, 1996). Additionally, Dyson (2001) summarized research that found that home-school communication increases different types of direct parental involvement with the school. Furthermore, in their review of existing literature, Carlson and Christenson (2005) suggested that the most successful parent involvement programs were those that

included successful methods of shared communication and dialogue about the child's educational services.

Christenson and Sheridan (2001) indicated that home-school communication is the most important element for parental involvement in a student's education. In addition, Mundschenk and Foley (1994) concluded that it is necessary for all information to be shared with parents and teachers so that all parties will have enough information for decision-making. A major goal of home-school communication is "to provide consistent messages to families that the school will work with them in a collaborative way to promote the educational success of the student" (Weiss & Edwards, 1992, p. 252). Besides delivering important information regarding a student's behavior or academic progress, home-school communication delivers other valuable messages to families: that schools want to work collaboratively with them, that parental input about the student is valued, and that mutual problem-solving is in the best interest of the student (Weiss & Edwards, 1992). Embracing such messages also allows for parents and teachers to trust and respect each other, which will likely reduce miscommunication (Mundschenk & Foley, 1994).

Therefore, communication between the home and school environments leads to joint recognition of information about a student, which facilitates collaborative educational decision-making (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). By communicating successfully and on an ongoing basis, important information is shared with both parties regarding student needs and skill levels, as well as expectations for the student in the classroom and at home. In addition, when parents and teachers communicate frequently and effectively, parents are able to learn ways to participate in the student's

learning at home. Furthermore, both parties learn to work collaboratively to best meet the needs of the student (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

Due to the importance of home-school communication in facilitating parental involvement in their child's education, researchers have investigated typical home-school communication practices. Despite the literature base to support parental involvement in schooling, it appears that schools generally do not communicate effectively with parents (Brantlinger, 1987; Childre & Chambers, 2005; Harniss, Epstein, Bursuck, Nelson, & Jayanthi, 2001; Harry, 1992; McNamara, Telzrow, & DeLamatre, 1999; Vaughn, 1988). The information that parents receive from their child's school frequently comes in written format, including report cards, letters to parents, and psychoeducational evaluations (Waltman & Frisbie, 1994). However, as Harry (1992) reports,

The very task of communicating with a parent about the learning difficulties of a child is by nature a high-context activity; that is, an activity in which all aspects of the discourse are dependent on subtle, often imprecise personal and cultural information—and therefore open to interpretation. To approach such a task with low-content tools such as standardized tests of language, intelligence, or academic skills, or with a chain of communication that relies on the most low-content of all communication tools—the written word—is to set the stage for failure (p. 113).

Harry (1992) argued that communicating with parents through written text assumes that parents understand the nature of their child's difficulties and the tools by which they are being assessed. Often times, parents are not informed of such details, so communicating in written format with little or no explanation is not helpful. In addition, the academic progress information that is provided to parents often requires a high level of comprehension for understanding (Harry, 1992; Roit & Pfohl, 1984), contains too much technical jargon (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Harry, 1992), and is presented too

late after their child's academic situation has worsened (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Jayanthi, Bursuck, Epstein, & Cumblad, 1992, as cited in Harniss et al., 2001). Misunderstanding frequently occurs when parents are asked to understand their child's report card grades (Waltman & Frisbie, 1994) as well as the results of psychoeducational evaluations (Harry, 1992; Roit & Pfohl, 1984). These forms of communication often lead to parental misunderstanding because of the variability in grading practices, the little amount of information that letter grades reveal about their child's progress, and the unfamiliarity with types of scores reported (e.g., standard scores) (Harry, 1992; Waltman & Frisbie, 1994).

One reason for this miscommunication is that school professionals rely heavily on technical and educational jargon when reporting academic information about students (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Harry, 1992). While this is sometimes evident with report card grades, it is most apparent during the presentation of psychoeducational report results, which contain information such as standard scores, percentile ranks, and test descriptions (Meisels, Xue, Bickel, Nicholson, & Atkins-Burnett, 2001). Parents often experience difficulty understanding educational terminology and the assessment process, but report that they want to know more about how it works (Robinson, 1996). Interestingly, in one study, parents did not feel that the educators should have spoken in more comprehensible terms, but that the parents themselves should have understood what was being described (Childre & Chambers, 2005). Providing academic information to parents in unconstructive ways not only limits their ability to understand their child's progress and engage in the decision-making process, but also forces them to feel powerless and uninvolved in the school setting (Harry, 1992).

Parents also report that they are not informed of their child's lack of academic progress until the situation has become considerably worse (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Jayanthi et al., 1992, as cited in Harniss et al., 2001). For example, this information may only be presented in a report card at the end of the grading period or in a report that parents do not get to view until their child's individualized education program (IEP) meeting. In one research study, parents expressed concern that they were unaware of their child's academic difficulties until the situation warranted a formal meeting or educational programming decision (Jayanthi et al., 1992, as cited in Harniss et al., 2001). They also were critical of the frequency of which they received information, as they noted that they did not receive academic progress information consistently throughout the school year (Jayanthi et al., 1992, as cited in Harniss et al., 2001).

All in all, although schools appear to be making an effort to provide parents with adequate academic progress information, they often do so in the form of written communication, which parents may not understand for many reasons. They may have a low level of literacy, may speak a primary language other than English, or may simply not understand how to interpret the information that the school sends home and its implications for their child's schooling (Harry, 1992). Furthermore, schools have traditionally communicated with parents after their child's situation has worsened rather than when the problem is first recognized.

Traditional Participation of Parents in Educational Decision-Making

Schools also communicate with parents via face-to-face communication, including parent-teacher meetings and more formal meetings for educational decision-making. While difficulties with home-school communication have been demonstrated in the literature, so have traditional patterns of parent participation in educational decision-

making. Traditionally, parents have held the following roles throughout their child's education: being informed of their rights and responsibilities, being informed of any changes to their child's education, giving consent for evaluations, and attending and receiving information during decision-making meetings (Barton, Barton, Rycek, & Brulle, 1984). All of these roles are markedly passive. Despite the passage of earlier laws, such as PL 94-142 in the 1970s which mandated that parents be active participants in their child's education, researchers concluded that parents were actually involved minimally in the process (Barton et al., 1984; Brantlinger, 1987; Gilliam & Coleman, 1981; Goldstein et al., 1980; Lusthaus, Lusthaus, & Gibbs, 1981; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988; Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, & Maxwell, 1978). The majority of these studies focused on parent participation during the IEP meeting because "it is often the parents' first contact with the decision-making process" and because parent expectations of their role in the decision-making process are often formulated at this time (Vaughn et al., 1988, p. 82).

From these studies, researchers discovered that parents are involved minimally in the educational decision-making process in that they are primarily passive recipients of information during the decision-making process (Lusthaus et al., 1981), that they are not provided with enough information from the school to be an active participant in the process (Barton et al., 1984), and that they are left out of the educational decision-making process until the time of the IEP meeting (Gilliam & Coleman, 1981; McNamara, Telzrow, & DeLamatre, 1999). There are many reasons for this low level of involvement during the decision-making process, including lack of parental knowledge about the process (Goldstein et al., 1980) and a high level of discomfort with the IEP conference

situation (Brantlinger, 1987). In addition, families are given few opportunities to participate in the process. For example, parents indicated that the educational goals for their child had already been drafted prior to the decision-making meetings and were made without their input (Sheehey, 2006). In fact, one study reported that 78% of parents were not contacted for their opinions or informational input before their child's IEP conference (Mundschenk & Foley, 1994).

IEP meetings are often closely linked to the information that is relayed through home-school communication, which impacts the quality of parental involvement in educational decision-making. When parents are primarily recipients of information and do not have ample opportunity to actively participate in the educational decision-making process, the process becomes professional- rather than student-centered (Childre & Chambers, 2005). Brantlinger (1987) aptly describes this situation: "When parents have less than complete information, viable choices are not likely, and special education professionals may simply be facilitating the agenda of those who wish to educate only certain learners in mainstream settings." (p. 100). That is, the individual student's situation is not considered during the process due to the lack of parental input, and the interests of the school professionals are carried out instead. Because parental informational needs regarding their child's academic progress are not being met, they feel lost and confused during the IEP process (Harry, 1992), which makes it difficult for parents to become actively involved in educational decision-making.

Professionals' perceptions of the roles of parents also hinder parental involvement during educational decision-making. In these studies, school professionals indicated that parents should only gather and present information about the student during the

decision-making process (Goldstein et al., 1980; Lusthaus et al., 1981) and that parents do not have the necessary expertise to participate in the process (Gilliam & Coleman, 1981). Therefore, professionals would prefer that parents wait passively as decisions are made about their child's education, rather than be involved in "developing and judging programs and finalizing decisions as active participants" (Gerber, Banbury, Miller, & Griffin, 1986, p. 158). Thus, parental participation during educational decision-making is adversely impacted by negative perceptions of parental involvement held by school-based professionals.

Interestingly, parental reactions to this low level of participation in decision-making during IEP meetings are varied (Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education, 2010). Despite having a low level of participation in the IEP meetings themselves, some parents reported surprisingly positive reactions to the conferences (Fish, 2008; Goldstein et al., 1980) while others reported feeling hindered by preset goals (Childre & Chambers, 2005) or feeling marginalized, isolated, and devalued (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Lo, 2008). Researchers suggest that the positive reactions might be "due to the parents' lack of knowledge of the purpose of the IEP meeting" (Goldstein et al., 1980, p. 284). Or, parents may have viewed any communication as an improvement over past experiences, or could have looked forward to any additional help their child would receive as a result of the IEP meeting (Fish, 2008; Goldstein et al., 1980). In contrast, it is likely that the negative perceptions resulted from the practices discussed earlier.

Overall, minimal parental involvement in educational decision-making is due to several factors, including the receipt of unconstructive information regarding their child

(Barton et al., 1984), the expectations of playing a passive role (Lusthaus et al., 1981), and IEP agendas that have already been determined by school staff without the help of parents (Gilliam & Coleman, 1981; Sheehey, 2006). In addition, the perceptions of school staff regarding the roles of parents in educational decision-making continue to promote a low level of parental involvement during the decision-making process (Fish, 2008; Yoshida et al., 1978). However, despite this, parents' reactions to the roles they play in educational decision-making are varied (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Fish, 2008; Goldstein et al., 1980; Lo, 2008).

In conclusion, what we have learned from research on parent involvement is that traditionally, parents are often passive recipients in the educational decision-making process. Not only are they provided with information by the school that is difficult to understand or that is delivered too late for meaningful involvement, but also, they are expected by school professionals to give and receive information during decision-making meetings rather than participate more actively. Despite this, their reactions to these experiences are sometimes positive, so it is important for future research to examine the nature of parent participation in educational decision-making, including desired roles and responsibilities during the process.

Rationale for Parental Involvement in RtI Processes

While the majority of research has concluded that parents are often passive players in their child's education, researchers have noted that many parents wish to take on an active role in educational decision-making (Lusthaus et al., 1981) and would like to become involved directly in their child's schooling (Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998). Such key places for parental involvement that align with RtI processes include improved home-school communication as well as enhanced involvement in educational

decision-making, such as involvement in prevention/early intervention and collaborative problem-solving. Although researchers have not examined parental involvement in RtI processes in total, various studies have made conclusions separately about the involvement of parents in the aforementioned processes.

The information that parents receive throughout RtI processes (i.e., home-school communication) differs from past practices. The content and meaningfulness of information collected through an RtI process is different than in traditional models, which should ideally have a positive influence on the level of involvement with their child's education. As discussed, NCLB (2002) requires that parents are informed of the classroom curriculum, assessment process, and state standards that their child is expected to meet. The content of this information will assist parents in understanding what their child is being taught and what they are expected to learn by the end of the school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). In addition, the standards information will help parents to understand typical performance of students in their child's grade (Deno, 2003). And, because parents will receive information about the instruction their child is receiving, they will be better able to collaborate with teachers during decision-making as well as assist their child in interventions at home (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). Therefore, RtI emphasizes a close link between the child's curriculum and what skills are being assessed, which is different than in previous models and practices.

Traditionally, common complaints that parents have had regarding information they receive from their child's school are that it is difficult to understand (Harry, 1992; Roit & Pfohl, 1984) and is delivered too late after a problem has worsened (Childre &

Chambers, 2005). But, the information delivered throughout an RtI process will hopefully alleviate such complaints. As opposed to cognitive and achievement data that is common for traditional psychoeducational evaluations, the information provided to parents throughout the RtI process is functional, instruction data related to a student's performance in their academic environment (Gresham, 2007). Receiving curriculum-based assessment information will help parents to understand what their child is learning and how successfully they have mastered particular skills. This kind of information is easier for parents to understand and preferred by them because it is more informative of a child's strengths and weaknesses (Meisels et al., 2001). Finally, this information is delivered on a frequent and consistent basis so that parents are informed of their child's progress before difficulties worsen (Deno, 2003).

One study that examined parents' level of satisfaction with an authentic performance assessment system put into place at their children's school (Meisels et al., 2001) mimics the ways in which academic information collected through the RtI process can be presented. Parents received assessment data about their child's progress with specific targeted skills over time. Parents reported that they had a good understanding of this type of assessment system. Furthermore, 79% indicated that it helped them to better understand the ways in which their child learns. In addition, 81% said they learned more about their child from this assessment system than they could have learned from a traditional report card. At the completion of the study, 62% of parents requested to receive this type of assessment information rather than a traditional report card (Meisels et al., 2001). Providing such information to parents may empower more parents to gain an understanding of their child's academic achievement, as well as

become information givers and active participants during educational decision-making (McNamara et al., 1999). These results would be vastly different than the patterns that research has revealed traditionally.

In addition to differences in home-school communication being different through an RtI process, points of active parental involvement throughout RtI also look different as compared with traditional practices. Numerous studies have indicated that parental involvement in prevention and early intervention activities assists in improving the academic and social-emotional functioning of students (Bradshaw, Zmuda, Kellam & Ialongo, 2009; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Reid, Eddy, & Fetrow, 1999). Such involvement allows parents to learn effective teaching strategies at home, as well as to better understand their child's academic progress (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2007). Christenson, Hurley, Sheridan, & Fenstermacher (1997) suggested that a greater congruence between home and school environments enhances student success in school. Such congruence can be achieved through streamlining intervention activities in both environments and involving all parties in the process. Furthermore, results of one study suggested that the degree to which parents supported interventions at home was significantly associated with their child's goal attainment (McNamara et al., 1999). That is, instead of becoming involved in primarily passive activities, such as giving consent and receiving information about their child, parental involvement through an RtI process would emphasize active involvement in direct intervention activities. These activities could range from helping to plan the intervention, to implementing interventions at home, to evaluating intervention effectiveness (McNamara, Telzrow, & DeLamatre, 1999). All in all, parents desire closer

and more direct involvement in their child's education (Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998) and the RtI process should help to facilitate such involvement.

Political initiatives, such as NCLB, encourage that parents become meaningful partners with schools throughout their child's education (Dowd-Eagle, 2007). One such way to do this is through collaborative problem-solving during RtI, which is a process that allows parents to participate meaningfully in planning, implementing, and evaluating educational services that their child is receiving. McNamara and colleagues (1999) argued that "parents play a key role in problem solving, not only as information givers, decision makers, and implementors of intervention plans, but also as potential advocates for the effectiveness of school policies and practices" (McNamara et al., 1999, p. 345). Researchers have suggested that parental involvement with school-based problem-solving teams has led them to better understand the systemic nature of schools and demonstrate their own expertise as well as understand the expertise of teachers (Jowett & Baginsky, 1988).

One example of the effectiveness of collaborative problem-solving was demonstrated by McNamara, Telzrow, and DeLamatre (1999), who examined the success of Intervention-Based Assessment (IBA) in several Ohio schools. IBA, which includes multidisciplinary problem-solving in conjunction with parents similarly to RtI, was introduced for the purpose of "empowerment of parents through active recruitment and nonhierarchical decision making" (McNamara et al., 1999, p. 345). Parents were involved throughout all stages of the problem-solving sequence. Overall, parents rated their experiences positively. And, the more they were involved throughout the IBA planning process, the more positively they rated their experiences. In particular, early

involvement was a key factor in satisfaction with the process: “Parents who had served on the multidisciplinary team from the start rated the intervention plan as more adequate in addressing their child’s special needs” (McNamara et al., 1999, p. 353). Furthermore, results indicated that intervention success was not necessarily related to parent satisfaction with the IBA process (McNamara et al., 1999), which suggests that parents’ level of active involvement is most closely related to their level of satisfaction with IBA.

In a dissertation study by Dowd-Eagle (2007), parents and teachers rated the collaborative problem-solving process as acceptable in meeting goals for students. Similar to the previous study, the more that parents were involved in the planning process, the more they were satisfied with it, regardless of student outcomes. Parents also agreed that the process was effective and that they were satisfied with it (Dowd-Eagle, 2007).

A study by Esquivel and colleagues (2008) also suggested that parents benefit when they are able to participate in problem-solving about their child. Besides enjoying involvement in the process, parents indicated that they gained helpful information from participating in collaborative problem-solving. Parents felt that receiving information about their child’s progress continuously and before the formal meetings was useful. Parents also suggested that they appreciated the use of data during decision-making, especially when their child had been receiving a number of interventions or when there was a dispute between team members (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008). In conclusion, parents have indicated in a number of studies that they want to continue to participate in activities associated with collaborative problem-solving and that they were satisfied with these opportunities (Dowd-Eagle, 2007; Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008; McNamara et

al., 1999). Despite this, however, research also indicates that parental involvement in collaborative problem-solving processes has been minimal (Wilson, Gutkin, Hagen, & Oats, 1998).

Overall, researchers have concluded that several core components of Rtl have been successful in meeting the needs of parents: the consistent delivery of assessment information connected to their child's curriculum, involvement in intervention activities throughout the decision-making process, and participation in collaborative problem-solving. Although researchers have not investigated the effects of all of these components together on parental involvement, it can be argued from examining various research studies that parents should be involved in these processes, which are core components of Rtl models.

All in all, home-school communication and parental participation in educational decision-making are important facets of parental involvement in a child's education. Increased involvement and effective home-school communication can have positive effects on student achievement, as well as parents' feelings toward the school environment and their ability to facilitate their child's success. Regardless of these findings, though, schools do not appear to be meeting the needs of many parents. Too often parents are uninformed about their child's academic progress and do not understand the information presented to them, and often times are passive participants throughout educational decision-making for their child. These traditional practices seem to be in sharp contrast with the requirements of parental involvement set forth by federal laws, such as NCLB and IDEA. With the recent implementation of Rtl, which aligns with the federal regulations mentioned above, schools have the opportunity to re-invent the

ways in which they inform parents about their child's academic progress and the ways in which parents are included in educational decision-making. However, professionals will need to examine the results of educational research that detail strategies for more effective home-school collaboration and understand the implications for RtI implementation in their schools.

Critique of Existing Literature and Problem Statement

RtI requires that parents receive functional, instructional data related to their child's performance in the academic environment on a frequent and ongoing basis (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Gresham, 2007), which often comes in the format of curriculum-based measurement and progress monitoring data (Deno, 2003). Given the recency of schools implementing RtI processes, research is not yet available on parental understanding of the academic information they receive about their child when a school is implementing RtI. However, parents have expressed difficulties understanding and using traditional sources of academic information (e.g., report cards, psychoeducational reports) and are not satisfied with the timing of when they receive this information (Barton et al., 1984; Waltman & Frisbie, 1994). Understanding the results of these past research studies can help to inform and guide researchers and practitioners regarding how academic progress information should be delivered to parents in newly implemented RtI systems. It is especially critical to investigate this phenomenon since RtI is the new framework promoted in federal regulations and policy initiatives (Reschly et al., 2007).

Meisels and colleagues' study (2001) investigated parental perceptions about a work sample system in elementary school, which reflects the way progress monitoring information can be delivered to parents. Results indicated that parents found this

method helpful to understanding their child's skills and areas of targeted needs. They also indicated they learned more about their child from this system than with traditional report cards, and that they would like to receive this type of information in the future (Meisels et al., 2001). While this is noteworthy, the parents in this study completed only one rating scale, which utilized a four point Likert scale, to assess their opinions about the effectiveness of the summary report, the effectiveness of the portfolio, and their overall opinions. Also, the survey was completed at only one point in time—after the system had been in place for a year. It is unknown if the parents' opinions changed over time, which information in the report was most helpful to them, or if the receipt of more instruction-based information enhanced their participation in educational decision-making. Other noteworthy research studies that examined home-school communication practices also utilized one-time parent surveys (Barton et al., 1984; Harniss et al., 2001; Waltman & Frisbie, 1994). Thus, research is needed to gain insight into parental understanding of information received, particularly through an RtI process, as this will inform school professionals of ways to enhance home-school communication practices within this new service delivery framework.

In terms of parental participation in educational decision-making, while the majority of research about educational decision-making has centered around parental participation during the IEP conference (Gilliam & Coleman, 1981; Goldstein et al., 1980; Lusthaus et al., 1981; Vaughn et al., 1988), research on parental participation in collaborative problem-solving is emerging. This most closely resembles educational decision-making during an RtI process. Studies by McNamara and colleagues (1999), Dowd-Eagle (2007), and Esquivel and colleagues (2008) have examined parental

participation in collaborative problem-solving. And, while the results of these studies are noteworthy, further research in this area is still needed. Two of the studies (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008; McNamara et al., 1999) utilized surveys to obtain general information about parental opinions while the other used standardized rating scales (Dowd-Eagle, 2007). McNamara and colleagues (1999) used a thirteen item, Likert scale survey that examined consumer satisfaction with the problem-solving process. Dowd-Eagle (2007) investigated similar areas by extracting particular scores from three different rating scales. The areas examined included effectiveness, acceptability, and satisfaction as rated by parents. While valuable information was gained from these studies, researchers examined general perceptions, such a level of satisfaction or enjoyment with the process, and did not gather information regarding the ways in which parents actually participated during educational decision-making. Furthermore, the researchers collected this information at one point in time, after the completion of the problem-solving process. It is important for future studies to examine parental participation through different activities and stages in an RtI process, and not just during one meeting.

In another study, Esquivel and colleagues (2008) mailed two qualitative surveys containing prompts about parental experiences with educational decision-making, such as what happened at the meeting and parents' reactions to the meeting. Interestingly enough, 31% of parents wrote about their experiences with an IEP conference, which is a formal meeting at one point in time, often focused on a placement decision (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008). The researchers concluded that parents enjoyed participating in problem-solving about their child and appreciated collaborative input from all parties.

Although the researchers sought the opinions of experienced parents on a special education advisory council using a qualitative methodology, their measure was a written survey with limited space, which could have hindered full parental input. In addition, the surveys only discussed one meeting where parents were present, and many parents responded about the IEP conference, which is traditionally where decisions occur after a problem-solving process has taken place. Furthermore, parents did not describe the ways in which they participated during educational decision-making. McNamara and colleagues (1999) suggested that it is important for future researchers to further examine the actual activities and contributions of parents during collaborative problem-solving rather than just their membership status.

Researchers have suggested that parents typically display passive participation during educational decision-making (Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education, 2010) and that many want to take on more direct roles during educational decision-making about their child (Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998; Lusthaus et al., 1981). Gaining a deeper understanding about these issues will aid in facilitating meaningful parental involvement throughout educational decision-making in RtI processes. Overall, these studies have examined a breadth of parental involvement roles using quantitative methodology, but none have examined these roles or experiences in the depth that can be gleaned from qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Therefore, examining this phenomenon by using a qualitative methodology and over a longer period of time will be helpful in achieving greater understanding of parental experiences.

This research study used a qualitative methodology to examine parental understanding of and involvement in a Response to Intervention (Rtl) process. More specifically, this study examined home-school communication practices with parents and parental participation in educational decision-making as part of an Rtl process in an elementary school. The primary research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do parents of children receiving intervention develop an understanding of academic progress information during an Rtl process?
2. How do parents of children receiving intervention participate in educational decision-making during an Rtl process?

CHAPTER 2 METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter outlines the research methodology and procedures that were used for this study. This includes information about the nature of the study, a description of the setting and participants, and the data collection procedures and analysis methods. In addition, methodological issues are discussed and a researcher subjectivity statement is provided.

Nature of the Research Study

This qualitative research study investigated parental understanding of, and involvement, in an elementary school RtI process. More specifically, this study examined home-school communication practices with parents and parental participation in educational decision-making in a school that implemented RtI. The primary research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do parents of children receiving intervention develop an understanding of academic progress information during an RtI process?
2. How do parents of children receiving intervention participate in educational decision-making during an RtI process?

Qualitative methodology was used to investigate these research questions because the goal of qualitative research is to “understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Qualitative researchers are most concerned with the ways in which individuals interact with the world around them, or the participants’ perspectives about a certain experience. That is, qualitative researchers “are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). Rather

than examining particular variables at a time, qualitative research is focused on the ways in which the parts work together as a whole, in order to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). In this case, there is a need to gain a deeper understanding about home-school communication practices in an Rtl model, parental participation in decision-making, and parent experiences and perspectives as they engage with school personnel in the Rtl process.

Although this will be discussed in more detail throughout the following section, a brief description of the methods and procedures for this study is provided. The data collection methods for this qualitative study included individual interviews, observations, and document review. Data collection began in February 2011 with an observation of the beginning of the year Student Success Team (SST) meeting for first grade. Then, the researcher met with the first grade teaching team (i.e., three teachers) to begin the recruitment process with parents. Primary participants included eight parents of first grade students who were receiving intervention in reading and/or math and one parent who was identified as a rich source of information, as well as the student's classroom teacher. These participants were interviewed around critical school dates (e.g., release of report cards, parent-teacher conferences), beginning in April 2011 and continuing until the end of the summer literacy program. Seven parents were interviewed one time and two parents were interviewed twice since their child attended the summer literacy program. The three teachers were interviewed once. In addition, other school personnel who were involved with the student and parents during an Rtl process were interviewed one time at the end of the school year. The researcher also conducted observations. These observations occurred during two grade-level Student Success Team (SST)

meetings at the school in February 2011 and April 2011. The researcher also observed one parent-team decision-making meeting in May 2011. The topics of this meeting included the student's academic progress, possible participation in the summer literacy program, and retention. Data analysis occurred continuously in conjunction with data collection so that researcher immersion with the data took place. Data were analyzed until no new themes emerged. Please see Table 2.1 for the data collection and analysis schedule for this study.

The purpose of the interviews, observations, and documents included examining the kinds of information parents receive from the school about their child's academic progress, what kinds of information were most helpful for parents, and the link between the information received and educational decision-making in RtI. The purpose of these procedures also was to examine parents' perceptions of the RtI process over a short period of time and their expectations for next steps. In addition, teachers' goals for involving parents, their rationale for presenting information in the ways they do, and what they wanted to accomplish during data presentation and decision-making were examined. The focus of interviews with other school personnel addressed their goals for communicating with parents, their framework for presenting data to parents and involving them in decision-making, and their perceptions about roles during the RtI process.

This study exhibited the six characteristics of qualitative research as defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). These criteria are: 1) the research is carried out in natural settings, 2) the researcher gathers the data directly, 3) the research provides rich narrative descriptions, 4) the research is concerned with process, 5) the data are

analyzed inductively, and 6) the perspectives of the participant are important. In other words, the researcher conducts the study within a naturalistic setting because they believe that behavior is observed most naturally in its original context (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the data that the researcher collected on-site were in the form of words, as direct quotations from participants help to illustrate the claims (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These data were then used to draw conclusions about a process (e.g., “How?” or “Why?”) rather than simply describe outcomes or products (e.g., “What?”), which leads to a rich portrayal of data that becomes more specific as the analysis process advances (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Yielding a rich description about process was particularly relevant for this study, as parental involvement within an RtI process has not yet been examined by researchers. Throughout all of these steps, the participants’ perspectives were the most important consideration, as it is the researcher’s goal to accurately capture the participants’ unique experiences and interpretations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Description of Setting

A university affiliated developmental research public school in north central Florida (DRS) was the setting for this study. DRS is a public school that serves 1155 students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. As a laboratory school, DRS is responsible for developing innovative educational solutions and providing that information to other school districts. Therefore, there is a strong emphasis placed on educational research. Furthermore, DRS seeks to enroll a student population that is representative of the state of Florida in terms of racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. This allows for research with a strong focus in working with diverse populations.

In addition to their dedication to innovative research, DRS was also chosen for the site of this study because of their history of Rtl implementation. The school began implementing Rtl in the 2006-2007 school year with the use of tiered intervention, progress monitoring, and data-based decision-making in K-2 reading instruction. Rtl processes were implemented in subsequent years to include reading in K-5, along with math and school-wide behavior systems. In addition to the use of a school improvement process to implement Rtl over a five-year period, DRS staff has initiated a series of Research in Action workshops to share data and information about the essential components of Rtl implementation, as well as the benefits and challenges of Rtl. These workshops have been provided to hundreds of teachers and administrators representing school districts in north central Florida over the past three years.

Description of Participants

Participants in this study included nine parents of first grade students, three teachers that comprise the first grade teaching team, and three instructional support personnel. Eight of the parents had a student who was receiving intervention services in reading and/or math. One parent, whose child was not receiving intervention services, was selected because the teacher nominated her as a source of rich information due to her experiences at DRS. Demographic information about the parent participants can be found in Table 2.2.

Selection of the first grade level was based on the amount of academic progress information and description of intervention services provided during first grade. The Rtl process focuses on early prevention and intervention, thus first grade includes the collection of extensive curriculum-based and progress monitoring data for students.

Academic difficulties identified at the middle and end of first grade often indicate a need for more intensive intervention services in reading and math.

In addition to parents, the teachers of the aforementioned students were primary informants for the study. The first grade team, which consists of three teachers, represented a range of professional experiences. See Table 2.3 for teacher demographic information.

Also, due to the nature of the Rtl process and the different circumstances around student academic needs, as well as parent and teacher interactions, other support personnel (i.e., curriculum coordinator, instructional support teacher, teacher on special assignment) were included as informants in the study. It was expected that support personnel would be able to provide rich, descriptive information due to interactions with the student through intervention, as well as the teachers and parents throughout the school year. In addition, these support personnel typically provide supplementary data regarding student academic progress to parents during the Rtl process and have distinct perspectives regarding parental participation in decision-making. Therefore, additional information was examined regarding how and what the problem-solving team communicates to the parents. See Table 2.4 for demographic information about the support personnel.

Thus, the researcher collected information by following nine parents from the release of midyear data to the end of the summer literacy program as the Rtl process proceeded for their child who was experiencing difficulties in reading and/or math. While specific learning needs and the circumstances differed for each of the nine students, the school-established process was followed, and thus parent understanding of relevant

academic progress information and their participation in educational decision-making were explored.

Merriam (2009) noted that nonprobability sampling is the most common participant sampling approach in qualitative research and it was utilized in this study. This represents purposeful sampling, or selecting a small number of participants, but exploring the research questions in great depth (Patton, 2002). Nonprobability sampling is most common when qualitative researchers are seeking to discover what is occurring, as well as the practical implications of those experiences. That is, “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Furthermore, as recommended by Merriam (2009), researchers select participants based on the goal and purpose of the research study by setting particular selection criteria. Because the goal of this study was to understand parent experiences in an Rtl process, the selection criteria included: 1) being a parent of a first grade student at DRS who is receiving academic intervention, and 2) being nominated by a first grade teacher who expected them to share rich information about their perceptions and experiences. It was presumed that the most would be learned from parents who met these criteria. After these selection criteria were met for the primary participants, the secondary participants were included. That is, the child’s classroom teacher and other members of the decision-making team were named as secondary participants due to their involvement with the parents throughout the Rtl process. Because these school professionals worked with the students and parents on a ongoing

basis, it was also assumed that they were able to provide valuable insights into parents' experiences during the Rtl process.

There are multiple types of nonprobability sampling, including typical sampling and snowball sampling, aspects of which were used to select the sample for this study. In particular, researchers utilize a typical sample because it “reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). To recruit potential participants, the researcher asked the first grade teachers to nominate parents in their classroom who met the aforementioned criteria. Then, the researcher sent out an informational letter about the study to all parents that the teachers nominated. The researcher then followed up with individual phone calls to ask if the nominated parents were willing to participate in this study. Fifteen parents were contacted by the researcher and nine parents indicated that they were willing to participate. Then, an initial interview was scheduled with each parent. By utilizing parents who had a child receiving intervention services and who received a wealth of information regarding their child's academic progress, it was presumed that this sample provided an intense representation of parental experiences in an Rtl process, both in terms of understanding the information and participating in decision-making.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection primarily occurred through the use of interviews, observations, and document review. Interview meetings were scheduled with each participant, and observations were conducted during predetermined parent-team and systems-level meeting times. All participants were informed of the purpose and components of the research study in the letter of consent and all participants signed the letter of consent (Appendix A, Letters of Informed Consent). Demographic information was also collected

from all of the participants. Participants were asked to complete the demographic information form (Appendix B, Demographic Information Forms) after the initial interview. The interview guides were tailored to participants based on their role during the Rtl process (Appendix C, Interview Guides).

Interviews

Interviews with participants were the primary means of data collection in this study. Patton (2002) indicated that the purpose of interviews is to find out things from participants that we would not understand from directly observing them. That is, “the purpose of interviewing...is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective...to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Furthermore, this conversation between the interviewer and interviewee is a purposeful one, or one in which the interviewer is seeking out information from the interviewee (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). An interview guide was utilized to focus the content of each interview (Appendix C). Topics that were addressed included the kinds of information parents receive from the school about their child’s academic progress, what information is most helpful for parents, and the link between the information received and educational decision-making. In addition, topics addressed during teacher interviews included their goals for involving parents, their rationale for presenting information in the ways they do, and what they hope to accomplish during data presentation and decision-making. The successive interview guides, including those with parents, teachers, and support personnel, were developed from emerging themes and unanswered questions out of the initial set of interviews and observations. These interviews focused on parents’ perceptions of the process from beginning to end, the value they place on particular kinds of information, and their expectations for next steps.

In addition, interviews with teachers and support personnel addressed their goals for communicating with parents, their framework for presenting data to parents and involving them in decision-making, and their perceptions about roles throughout the process.

The use of an interview protocol allows for a semi-structured approach to interviewing. That is, although particular pre-determined topics are initiated, this approach is more flexible so that the interviewer can prompt or probe for further detail when necessary (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the approach is both structured (in the topics selected) and flexible (in the amount of detail that the interviewer seeks out based on the goal of the question). In addition, utilizing this type of interview meets three other goals: 1) The interview protocol is available for future inspection, 2) the interview is focused for the sake of time efficiency, and 3) analysis is facilitated by making responses easier to find and compare across participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002). Thus, collecting data using this approach helps to facilitate a richer understanding of parent, teacher, and support personnel perspectives, yet offers a reasonable balance between structure and flexibility to aid in understanding their perspectives on a meaningful level.

This study included a series of interviews with parents, teachers, and support personnel over a 5-month period. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 90 minutes and was audiotaped so that the conversations were preserved for continuous analysis. In addition, the interviewer took detailed field notes during the interviews. The purpose of the notes was not to write the conversation verbatim, but to assist the interviewer in formulating prompts or additional questions for the current interview, and to provide

relevant insights into future interview protocols (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, note-taking assists in practical aspects of data analysis, such as serving as a back-up in the event that the tape recorder fails, helping to locate important quotations, and providing nonverbal feedback to the participant about what is notable (Patton, 2002).

As described earlier, parents were the primary informants in this study as the goal was to examine their perceptions and experiences throughout the Rtl process. However, teachers and other support personnel, such as instructional support teachers and other support staff, were also participants in this study. There are limitations to collecting data through interviewing techniques. Most notably, as Patton (2002) described: “Because qualitative methods are highly personal and interpersonal...and because in-depth interviewing opens up what is inside people—qualitative inquiry may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than...quantitative approaches” (p. 407). That is, due to the personal nature of the interview process, some participants may not feel comfortable and may react negatively to the interviewer in a variety of ways, from not discussing a topic or changing their answers so that they feel protected (Hatch, 2007). Furthermore, qualitative researchers are sometimes accused of “leading” participants’ answers in their wording of questions. To address these issues, the proposed study occurred in a comfortable and familiar place for the participants (i.e., on the school campus). Rapport was also established with the participants before asking questions from the interview protocol so that participants felt comfortable in the interviewing situation (Hatch, 2007). In addition, the interviewer utilized active listening skills so that the participants feel understood and important, and open-ended questions were used so that participants’ voices were heard (Hatch, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Observations

Merriam (2009) emphasized the importance of interweaving interviews and observations as primary types of qualitative data collection. These two methods are complementary because, while interviews can elicit information about participants' perceptions of the world, observations occur in the natural setting itself and represent a direct and personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated (Merriam, 2009). In fact, Patton (2002) indicated that, without personally experiencing a phenomenon and relying merely on interview data, it is difficult to fully understand the experience. Observations have other benefits too, including allowing the researcher to be open and inductive in the new setting, uncovering information that participants may be unaware of or have not paid attention to, and discovering information that participants may not want to discuss in an interview (Patton, 2002). Researchers can also use their unique firsthand experience when interpreting the observations, rather than relying on secondhand report of the experience (Merriam, 2009). To gain this firsthand experience, the researcher had the opportunity to observe two grade-level SST meetings and one parent-team meeting that was held to discuss academic issues and retention at the end of the school year.

Although observations are often used as a source to help triangulate and confirm existing data (Merriam, 2009), there are limitations to conducting observations. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Patton (2002) summarized these limitations, which include selective perception of data by the researcher, difficulty observing particular behaviors, and participants feeling intruded upon or watched, which may change their typical behavior. However, to combat these limitations, observation can be used as a research tool, rather than in everyday living, meaning that the observer trains his or her self to

learn to pay attention, to write descriptively, to practice recording field notes, and to know “how to separate detail from trivia...and using rigorous methods to validate observations” (Patton, 2002, p. 260-261).

Document review

The third data collection strategy that was employed in this study was review of relevant documents. Merriam (2009) indicated that, in fact, document review is not much different from interviews and observations, because what is said in the documents is often comparable to what is seen and heard in fieldwork. In fact, reviewing these documents can provide a closer look at what is not revealed in observations and interviews (Patton, 2002). As in interviews and observations, the data gathered from documents “can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track change and development, and so on” (Merriam, 2009, p. 155). In addition, there are strengths of incorporating documents as sources of data. First, documents are easily accessible to the researcher. Unlike interviews and observations, documents are sources of data that can be collected unobtrusively in most settings and in a brief amount of time. Also, the researcher can collect documents without necessary cooperation from other people (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, as was the case in this study, documents “contain information that would take an investigator enormous time and effort to gather otherwise” (Merriam, 2009, p. 155). Finally, documentary material is stable in that the presence of the researcher does not change what is being said or done. That is, documents provide a more objective source of data for qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).

The types of documents included as sources of data in this study were the curriculum-based measurement (CBM) sheet and field notes. These CBM sheets were delivered to parents four times a year and detailed their student's academic progress. In addition, included on the back of the CBM sheet was an explanation of the assessments that students were administered that year. This provided brief descriptions about what each assessment was measuring as well as simple definitions of the areas of reading. Finally, the researcher took notes during grade-level SST meetings and the parent-team meeting.

There are limitations to document review. Some data may be incomplete or incompatible for use in a research study. Or, the documents may be in a format that is not helpful to the researcher. Finally, researchers may experience difficulty determining the "authenticity and accuracy" of such documents (Merriam, 2009, p. 154). However, as Merriam (2009) indicated, a document is deemed valuable if it contains insight that may be pertinent to the research questions and if it can be obtained in a logical manner. Based on these statements, the documents in this study were considered of value for data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process, which took place during the spring semester and the summer literacy program of the 2010-2011 school year. This continual analysis process is due to the fact that qualitative analysis is dynamic and emergent, so it should continue as data are still being collected (Merriam, 2009). Because this study examined a topic that has not yet been investigated by previous researchers, the purpose was to conduct a descriptive study about parental experiences in understanding information and participating during educational decision-

making during an RtI process. The stages of data analysis will be described in the following section.

Patton (2002) indicated that the first step of data analysis, after transcribing interviews verbatim, is to develop a coding scheme. This is further described as “identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns in the data...analyzing the core *content* of the interviews and observations to determine what’s significant” (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Units of data, or codes, were identified that have the potential to relate to the research question and can be understood on its own without additional context (Merriam, 2009). In this study, notes were made in the margins of the transcripts and observation notes to identify such codes. All of these potential codes were typed. Then, similar notes were organized into a single system, and a code label was given for that topic. When possible, notes relating to the same code were categorized using similar language to facilitate the sorting process. In this study, the first reading was done to develop the coded categories, and subsequent readings were conducted to formalize the coding systematically (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

During the next stage of data analysis, the task is to move from

concrete description of observable data to a somewhat more abstract level...using concepts to describe phenomena...classifying data into some sort of schema consisting of categories, themes...The categories describe the data, but to some extent they also interpret the data (Merriam, 2009, p. 188).

That is, these coded categories were further grouped on a more abstract level, as themes emerged naturally from the categorized codes. This process continued throughout immersion of the data until no new categories or themes were discovered, as all categories will be “responsive to the purpose of the research, exhaustive, mutually

exclusive, sensitizing, and conceptually congruent” (Merriam, 2009, p. 186). That is, constantly comparing the data throughout the initial coding and thematic understanding levels of analysis ensures that all substantive data are revealed (Merriam, 2009).

Methodological Issues

Although methodological issues can arise when conducting any type of research, steps were taken to ensure that the data used in this study were valid and reliable sources of information. The primary techniques incorporated in this study to address methodological issues included triangulating data, constantly comparing the data, utilizing a researcher journal, and implementing member checks. The techniques will further be explained in the following section.

Researchers have distinguished four methods for triangulating data, all of which strengthen the value of the study’s results. These types include data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In this study, data triangulation and methodological triangulation were used. Data triangulation refers to using a variety of data sources in a study (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In this study, the experiences of parents were examined by including parents, teachers, and support personnel as key sources of information. In addition, methodological triangulation, which is using multiple methods to study a phenomenon, was also utilized (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The multiple methods were individual interviews with all study participants (i.e., parents, teachers, and support personnel) as well as observations during educational decision-making meetings in which these participants are present and review of relevant documents. Incorporating these two types of triangulation into the current study allows for “cross-data validity checks” rather than relying on one source of information or one method to

obtain the data (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the interconnectedness of interviews and observations were discussed earlier. By utilizing interviews and observations throughout the study, the limitations of one method can be accounted for by the strengths of the complementary method (Patton, 2002).

Another technique that was used in this study to enhance the credibility of the findings was long-term observation of the phenomenon, which occurs when “you begin to see or hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as you collect more data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). That is, long-term observation of a phenomenon allows for researcher immersion with the data over time until no new information is revealed (Patton, 2002). Utilizing this technique allows for constant interaction with the data, using multiple sources and methods throughout the analysis until no more unique information is discovered. In this study, the researcher was immersed in the data from the midyear SST meeting, and continued to be immersed through interviews, observations, and document review over a five month period.

The researcher also utilized a researcher’s journal throughout the data analysis process. The purposes of keeping a researcher’s journal include: to explore preliminary themes and interpretations, to think critically about the context of the study as well as more theoretical issues, and to refine future interview protocols (Merriam, 2009). Because the analysis process was ongoing for several months, the researcher was able to keep track of emerging themes from the data in a structured way. In addition, it facilitated the process of checking that no new themes had emerged after all of the data were analyzed together. The researcher was also able to reflect on participants’ words and the relationship of the emerging themes to broader theoretical issues. Furthermore,

memos from the researcher journal aided in tailoring the initial and follow-up interview protocols.

Finally, member checks were integrated into the methodology of this study. Member checks include “soliciting feedback on your emerging findings from some of the people that you interviewed” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). In doing this, the researcher asks whether the interpretation “rings true” to the participants so that they can provide their input “throughout the course of the study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). In this study, initial interpretations were shared with three parents and three teachers. The researcher utilized member checks to ensure the accuracy of the findings, but also to seek out feedback from the participants regarding the interpretation (Hatch, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Participants were invited to share their opinions and reactions to the data interpretation, as qualitative data collection and analysis is often a coconstructive process, and it is important to examine the findings “in partnership with the participants” (Hatch, 2007, p. 188).

Researcher Subjectivity Statement

Another way to enhance the reliability and validity of the study findings is to understand the experiences and assumptions of the researcher conducting the study (Hatch, 2007; Merriam, 2009). As the primary data collector for this study, it is important to understand information that as a researcher, I have unique perspectives and experiences related to the topic of this study.

I entered into the school psychology program at the University of Florida in the fall of 2007, directly after graduating with my B.A. in psychology and comparative religion from Miami University in Ohio. I earned my M.Ed. in school psychology in 2010 during the pursuit of my Ph.D. in school psychology. While I had worked with children in

various ways, I had never been employed in a school setting before entering graduate school. I volunteered throughout college as a tutor for kindergarten and fifth grade students struggling in reading, math, and science. I also worked for several summers as a counselor at a therapeutic summer day camp for children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD). But, when I entered into my graduate program, I was new to the intricate inner-workings of school systems. Throughout my time at UF, I have gained practicum experience at DRS for two years as well as in two other counties surrounding Gainesville, Florida. Although I learned a great deal of information and gained practical skills from all of these placements, each was vastly different from the next, yet all have influenced the ways I conceptualize school psychological services as well as parental involvement roles.

Working at DRS as a practicum student opened my eyes to a more innovative school system. Not only does DRS place a heavy emphasis on learning from research and has a majority of teachers with advanced degrees, but also school staff have been in the process of implementing RtI for a number of years. Furthermore, they have implemented a number of opportunities for parental involvement and the parents at DRS appear to be more involved in their children's education than was observed at other school sites. These characteristics are important to note because through experiences at DRS, I have been able to gain a greater understanding of the effectiveness of RtI processes and have personally witnessed the positive outcomes of parental involvement. For example, during my third year, I consulted with a teacher and parent regarding a student's behavioral difficulties in the classroom. I used a Conjoint Behavioral Consultation model (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008) to address the student's

difficulties, and think of it as one of my most successful cases to date. This was due to shared responsibility of all parties in the student's success as well as consistency between the home and school environments since the teacher and parent were implementing similar interventions (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008). I understand that not every case will result so positively, but having an "ideal" experience certainly enlightened me about the powerful benefits of parental involvement. Furthermore, in terms of Rtl implementation at DRS, I have observed parents' joy about their child responding to a new intervention, as well as the advantages of collaborative problem-solving between parents, teachers, and other school professionals. Contrasting these experiences with some experiences I've had at other schools has opened my eyes to the research to practice gap that is all too common in schools today. These experiences enhanced my desire to conduct research that will inform effective practices, especially in terms of facilitating meaningful parental involvement in their child's education.

Table 2-1. Data collection and analysis schedule

Date	Task
February 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended mid-year SST meeting.
March 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed student CBM data. • Recruited 9 parents, 3 teachers, and 3 support staff as participants.
April 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted initial interviews with parents. • Attended the end-of-year SST meeting. • Transcribed parent interviews. • Began researcher journal. • Began analysis of interviews.
May 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted teacher interviews. • Attended one formal decision-making meeting with parent present. • Transcribed teacher interviews and observation notes from meetings. • Analyzed parent and teacher interviews together.
June 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted interviews with school support personnel. • Transcribed support personnel interviews. • Continued to analyze data from all of the participants together.
July 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted follow-up interviews with parents whose child participated in the summer literacy program. • Transcribed follow-up parent interviews.
August 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued ongoing data analysis. • Finished interviews with school support personnel.
September 2011-February 2012 March 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finished interview transcriptions. • Continued data analysis. • Shared preliminary findings with participants for member checking.

Table 2-2. Parent demographic information

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Level of Education	Child's Intervention Services
A	41	Female	Caucasian	Graduate/professional school	Tier 2 in reading
B	53	Female	Caucasian	College	Tier 2 in reading
C	29	Female	Caucasian	College	Tier 2 in reading, Tier 2 in behavior
D	40	Female	Caucasian	College	No intervention services
E	41	Female	Caucasian	Graduate/professional school	Tier 2 in reading
F	34	Female	Caucasian	College	Tier 2 in reading
G	42	Female	Caucasian	Graduate/professional school	Tier 2 in reading
H	45	Female	Caucasian	Graduate/professional school	Tiers 2 & 3 in reading and math
I	31	Female	African-American	Graduate/professional school	Tiers 2 & 3 in reading

Table 2-3. Teacher demographic information

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years teaching	Years at DRS	Years involved with Rtl
1	26	Female	Caucasian	2	2	2
2	50	Female	Caucasian	28	25	5
3	56	Female	Caucasian	30+	14	5

Table 2-4. Support personnel demographic information

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in education	Years at DRS	Years involved with Rtl	Involvement with Rtl process
1	34	Female	Hispanic	13	8	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as elementary Reading Coach. • Lead the Rtl Leadership team. • Lead grade-level SST meetings. • Coordinate Rtl efforts in elementary school.
2	30	Female	Caucasian	8	8	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom teacher providing Tier 2 intervention. • Instructional support teacher in grades 4 & 5 providing Tier 3 reading and math intervention. • Teacher on special assignment responsible for elementary school administration and participation on RTI leadership team.
3	41	Female	Caucasian	20	3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional support teacher for grades K-2 providing Tier 3 reading and math intervention.

CHAPTER 3 RESULTS

DRS was the setting for this study. DRS is a public school that serves 1155 students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Approximately 350 students are enrolled in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school began implementing Rtl in the 2006-2007 school year with the use of tiered intervention, progress monitoring, and data-based decision-making in reading instruction in kindergarten through second grade. Rtl processes were implemented in subsequent years to include reading in third through fifth grade, along with math and school-wide behavior systems. This study was designed to investigate two research questions regarding parents' understanding of and participation in the Rtl process at DRS through the use of interviews, observations, and document review. More specifically, this study examined the ways in which parents developed an understanding of their children's academic progress information as well as the ways in which parents participated in educational decision-making for their children. In addition, the roles that teachers and other support personnel at the school played in parents' understanding and participation in decision-making were explored.

Eight parents of first grade students receiving intervention in reading and/or mathematics and one parent who was identified as a rich source of information were the primary participants in this study. In addition, the first grade teaching team was asked to participate. Other members of school staff (i.e., an instructional support teacher, the curriculum coordinator, and a teacher on administrative assignment) were also asked to participate based on their level of involvement with the parents throughout the Rtl process. Qualitative methodology was used to gain a deeper understanding about home-school communication practices in an Rtl model, parental participation in

decision-making, and parent experiences and perspectives as they engage with school personnel during the Rtl process.

The results of this study are organized around the two major research questions, which are: 1) How do parents of students receiving intervention develop an understanding of academic progress information during at Rtl process?; and 2) How do parents of children receiving intervention participate in educational decision-making during an Rtl process? Analysis of the data related to specific themes, and quotes from parents, teachers, and school support personnel will be provided.

Data analysis produced four major themes regarding the ways in which parents develop an understanding of their children's academic progress information: 1) diverse and numerous opportunities to make sense of their child's progress; 2) reliance on joint examination of the data; 3) establishing a close, trusting relationship with their child's teacher; and 4) realizing the "whole picture" of their child. In terms of parent participation in decision-making for their children, three interactive and connected themes were revealed: 1) determining their level of involvement based on the intensity of their child's needs; 2) experiences within the parent-teacher dyad; and 3) interacting with existing components of the school system. The following chapter provides a detailed discussion about each of these themes.

The Ways in Which Parents Develop an Understanding of Their Child's Academic Progress Information

In this section, the four major themes regarding the ways in which parents developed an understanding of their child's academic progress information will be discussed. The four themes are: diverse and numerous opportunities to make sense of the data; reliance on joint examination of the data; establishing a close, trusting

relationship with the child's teacher; and realizing the "whole picture" of their child's academic progress. Please see the following figure for a visual display of the themes represented in the first research question.

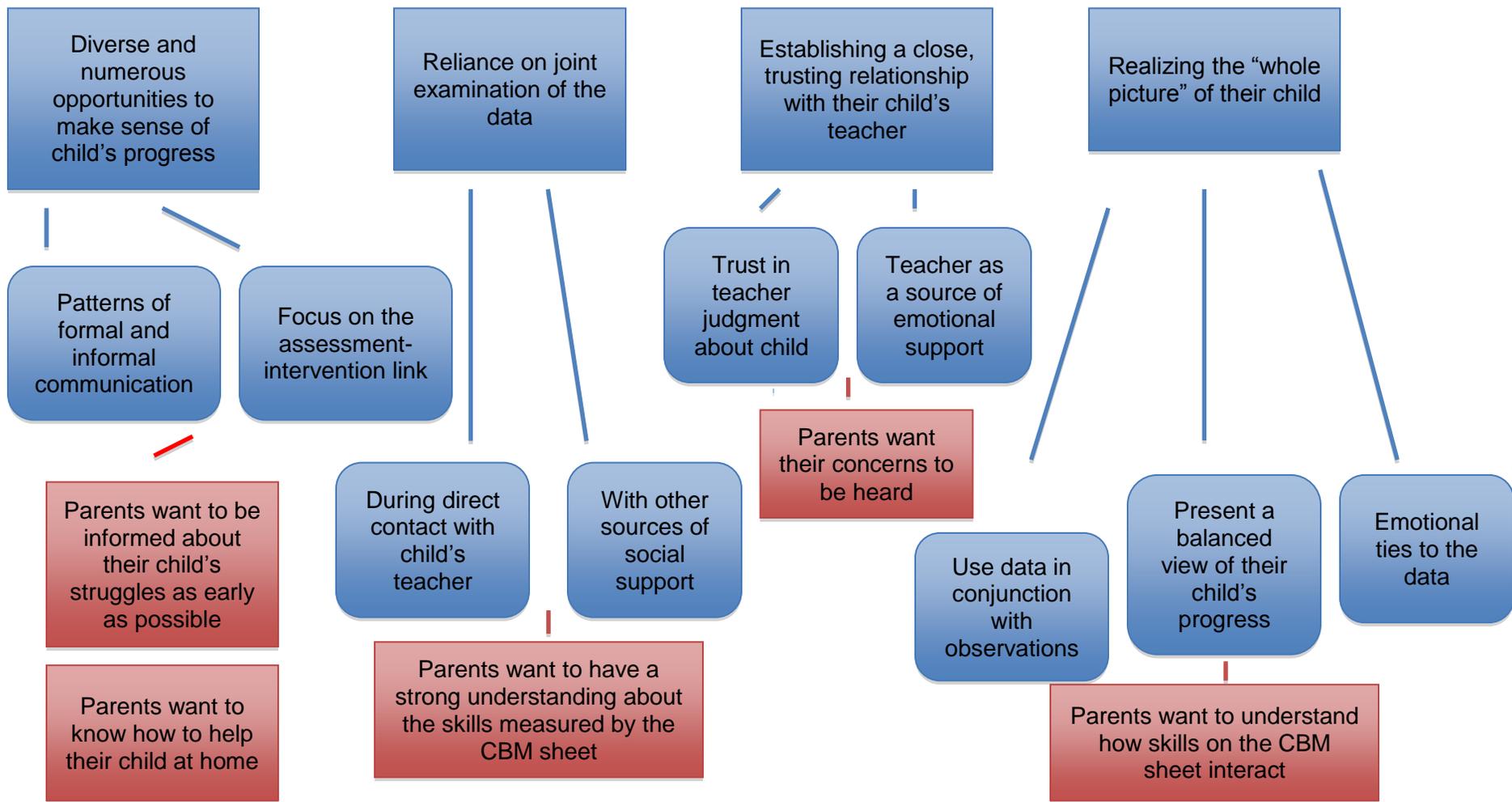


Figure 3-1. How do parents of children receiving intervention develop an understanding of academic progress information during an RtI process?

Diverse and Numerous Opportunities to Make Sense of the Data

This theme emerged from the data as parents consistently discussed developing an understanding of their child's data through a variety of informational sources and interacting directly with the child's teacher and other school staff. Parents relied on qualified professionals to help them make sense of the data and better understand their child's achievement, and conversations often centered on the assessment-intervention link. At DRS, parents were afforded a variety of opportunities to interact with teachers and other school staff. This included formal interactions, such as during parent-teacher conferences and through the curriculum-based measurement (CBM) sheet, as well as informal interactions, such as phone calls, emails, and seeing each other before and after school. Through these interactions, parents were able to gain a well-rounded understanding about how their child was progressing in school and what they could do to help at home. These interactions also allowed them to ask questions, express concerns, and understand what was happening in the classroom.

Patterns of Formal and Informal Communication

DRS has a formal, school-wide protocol for establishing initial parent contact, which all teachers in this study followed. As Teacher 1 states: "The protocol is that we test every nine weeks and then after the first assessment time is when we bring the parents in. It's kind of like October-November is conference month. That's the formal time". In the fall, an individual parent conference is held with each student's parents to discuss their child's academic progress. At this time, they are given the first formal indicator of their child's academic progress: the curriculum-based measurement (CBM) sheet. The CBM sheet details their child's progress on classroom-based assessments

in all areas of reading and in their overall math achievement. The assessment tools used to measure progress are also listed. Their child's scores are indicated, and the grade-level benchmarks during each assessment period throughout the year are also denoted on the CBM sheet. On the back of the CBM sheet, parents are given a brief description about what each area of reading means.

When asked about parent-teacher conferences, parents generally presented clear descriptions of the conference protocol, as Parent D described:

The first conference is the end of the first 9 weeks. If they've had any of those assessments done, we discuss those. And sort of their progress, again fitting into the group, their behavior, how they've scored based on...sometimes we look at last year's last quarter CBM. Sometimes there is quite a shift, a drop, or maybe just staying the same and you wonder why and so the teachers have always been good at explaining how the summer relates to that. The different skill levels that are expected in the next grade if they progress, different expectations also.

Parent H also said: "She helps explain a lot of it, and in the meetings, Teacher 3 certainly clarifies a lot of it as well to kind of give us an idea of like where he is and where we want to get him to and kind of what her goals are and how she--what she's doing to work towards those goals". All parents in this study attended the initial parent conference, and it was obvious that they had a understanding of the goals of this meeting. Similarly, regardless of the teacher whose class their child was in, parents described the conference outline in remarkably similar ways. Through following the school-wide protocol, the first grade teaching team created a well-defined agenda for the conference situation that the parents understood and could recall.

Another major element of the conference situation was the use of the CBM sheet (Appendix D, Sample CBM Sheet). Teachers suggested that the CBM sheet is used as

the primary frame of reference during the conference when describing to parents their child's academic progress. Teacher 3 indicated:

I do use our CBM form as my frame of reference because that says all the information really clearly. It's because it is all numerical, and with that, there are many different kinds of tests, but I feel like that's been very helpful...what the expectations were and where their child scored within that realm...Where their child is and where they need to go. That's actually been really helpful.

As Teacher 3 suggested, teachers feel that the use of the CBM sheet helps to streamline communication with parents by clearly describing grade-level expectations in comparison to their child's progress. After the first formal conference with parents, the CBM sheets are sent home for the remaining three quarters. She also saw that the CBM sheet improved the ease of explaining individual student data and the objectivity of the data source. The CBM clearly, specifically, and visually displayed individual student progress in relation to grade-level targets in each academic area. Furthermore, Teacher 2 suggested that the CBM sheet was helpful in explaining grade-level expectations: "I think it's a good way to show the parents what our goals are for first grade". So, parents were able to see the current benchmark for the academic area as well as the end-of-the-year expectation. Parents also appreciated this aspect, as Parent D described: "I think it also is helpful to us as parents that we get to look at sort of what he's expected to do by the fourth quarter. I like how that's already there and we can constantly kind of revisit that and see the overall picture".

In addition, the objectivity of the data was helpful when communicating to parents about their child. Teacher 3 indicated that "because it's objective rather than subjective, parents really seem to get it, grasp it better". She further stated:

I felt like there was a lot less parent...potential upset. Like parents would come back and say well you said, you said this. There was a lot more of

you said this and now you're saying this and it doesn't match. Where from my point of view, what I was saying was very similar, but when it's numbers on a page and we have this ongoing history, there's not so much upset generated on the parents' part. Fewer surprises because otherwise parents hear what they want to hear, but when they are seeing it as well, there's just less discrepancies. And less upset I think on the parents' part.

The use of the CBM sheet provided a framework for the clear presentation of comprehensive data. It also allowed for teachers to talk objectively about child progress with their parents, which also decreased the potential for parent upset about a teacher's subjectivity. Communicating with the CBM sheet seemed to make the grading process more uniform for teachers and provide a comprehensive picture regarding a child's skills. Thus, when communicating about a student's achievement, teachers were able to talk about a child in context of their performance using data as a guide for the conversation. Researchers (Harry, 1992; Waltman & Frisbie, 1994) suggested that parental misunderstanding is often caused by variability in grading practices and the little amount of information that letter grades reveal about a child's progress. In the case of DRS, however, the CBM sheet is used each quarter and across grades.

While communication occurred through formal routes of the parent-teacher conference and the CBM sheet, it also happened through more informal routes, such as email, phone calls, and check-ins during student drop-off and pick-up after school. Teacher 2 seemed to utilize phone calls the most, saying: "So it's mostly phone calls...I make phone calls when I'm concerned about things. But then I try to be able to make a phone call too maybe if we've been concerned about something and I'm seeing a change, we've seen some progress. I try to make a follow up phone call too". Teacher 3 and Teacher 1 seemed to prefer sending emails as a quick check-in with parents.

Teacher 3 said, “Lots of family emails...individualized emails...Used to do a lot more phone calling before email”. Teacher 1 added:

I communicate mostly through email, so something comes up, I email them. I also email them every Friday as to say this is what we’re doing next week in the classroom...I feel like that’s a quick way so that parents can be in the loop and ask their kids, you know, when they come home. And then also, then parents if they have any questions can feel free to email me back.

In fact, most teachers and parents agreed that more frequent communication about day-to-day news occurred informally. Teacher 1 stated: “I feel like more happens through the day to day discussions on the front circle or a parent popping their head in or sending an email versus like the actual sit down, let’s look at the scores. I feel like that happens almost weekly”. Teacher 3 added: “And so the more kids I have that go to parent pick up or that actually bring kids in the morning, the more face to face contact I end up having”.

These informal, frequent conversations were an additional source of information for parents to stay connected to the classroom and updated about their child’s progress.

Parent A indicated that this communication happened on an almost daily basis:

She’s really good about talking with me after school if there’s something going on, just if I’m picking him up... I love the circle because I just see her do that with all of us. You know, she’s letting us know just kind of good day/great day, this is you know, gosh we did quarters today and he got that so quickly. Just you know, those regular check ins are, to me, very helpful.

Having informal routes of communication allowed for more frequent contact instead of relying solely on formal lines of communication. Informal contact also allowed parents to remain updated even if they were unable to be present at school for a meeting or conference. Parent C described the importance of these informal check-ins for parents who are unable to be at school each day: “And I do like that she keeps in contact through email, constantly sending home reminders and giving progress updates as far

as all the kids made their reading log, their 75 minutes this week, so everybody gets a prize. You know, stuff like that, it keeps you connected to the classroom without having to be there”.

While parents found the informal routes of communication to be helpful for quick updates, most indicated that they did not want to hear important updates about their child’s education through a phone call or an email. They appreciated receiving that kind of news in a face-to-face meeting. Parent I best expressed this concern:

Well when it comes to my kids, I don’t want to email anything, I want to see you face to face...So when I drop him off, if it’s something that I’m concerned about that I’m seeing at home so I want to know how is this working at school, I just, like if I’m dropping him off for school, I just stay and wait until they walk off to class to talk to the teacher.

Overall, teachers also indicated that they communicated with parents of students receiving intervention more frequently in comparison to other parents. Teacher 3 stated: “And kids that are being progress monitored or are receiving intervention are families that I have more regular, specific contact with”. And, Teacher 1 added: “Especially the kids that are struggling. I’ll talk to their parents you know, three, four, five times a year”. So, despite there being a school-wide protocol for formal communication, it was evident that parents of students receiving intervention are in more frequent contact with their child’s teacher.

All in all, using informal modes of communication helped to maintain frequent communication between parents and teachers. It also allowed teachers to deliver information to parents that served as good updates about the child’s progress. Parents and teachers suggested that informal communication occurred much more frequently than formal routes of communication. And, although teachers did not use informal communication methods to deliver information that was as comprehensive as what was

received during the conference, these routes of communication seemed to be just as valuable for parents. Parents appreciated the ability to stay updated about their child and the classroom, especially when they received that information frequently.

Focus on the Assessment-Intervention Link

A majority of the parent-teacher conversations were centered on the assessment-intervention link. This occurred for several reasons, including that teachers informed parents what they were doing to help their struggling child in the classroom and because all parents expressed a desire to help their child at home.

During the conference situation and throughout the year, teachers informed parents about their child's area(s) of difficulty. This was based on information shared through the CBM sheet, so parents were able to see gaps in their child's achievement. For teachers, a natural progression from talking about the assessment piece was to discuss the intervention strategies they had used with that student to improve their skills in the classroom. Parent H indicated that this conversation happened without her having to ask the teacher what her child was receiving in the classroom to help improve his skills:

So it really hasn't been as if we've had to say, well what are you doing here, because we see that he's below grade level. When they present those, both of them have been very efficient and effective in telling us as they present them what they're doing to be able to help with each of those areas. And some pretty specific, you know, specific things about when he would, what it would be in his reading, what she was doing in class to be able to help him with his reading. Or she would pull him aside, you know, if there was something he was struggling with, or help him with a particular area. So both of them were very proactive in telling us what their plans were for them as he came up short in the different areas.

Parent B also described how this conversation occurred naturally during her contact with the teacher: "We talked a little bit about the strategies she is employing in the

classroom to try to kind of emphasize or focus on the areas where we noted some weaknesses”. Again, the use of data led to an inherent conversation about intervention strategies in the classroom.

All parents in this study expressed a desire to help their child with academic tasks at home. Henderson and Berla (1994) discovered that support for learning at home is becoming a more prevalent role that parents wish to take on in their child’s education. In this study, understanding that their child was not making adequate progress incited parents to seek out opportunities to help their child as much as they could. Most of the time, they sought advice from their child’s teacher, as Parent B noted: “And then like I said, a couple more times just more focused on strategies of ways to help out at home. Things that were working well in the classroom, to try and reinforce what she’s doing in the class”. Parents appreciated when teachers gave them specific strategies to practice their targeted areas at home. This occurred frequently as parents requested more information about how to take part in their child’s learning at home. For example, Parent G said, “Teacher 2 has been really, really good at telling me things that I could do at home. So she’s recommended we buy a white board. So we purchased a white board and then she’s given me lists of things we could be doing on the white board, and those kinds of things”. Parent F had a similar experience, stating: “And then areas that P wasn’t quite where she needs to be, we obviously spent a lot more time on those areas and what kinds of things we could do at home to help raise those scores”.

Furthermore, parents often used these conversations to discover ways to streamline home-school intervention. Once parents were able to find ways that the teacher was helping their child at school, they wanted to attempt to employ similar

strategies at home. Parent B provided an example of this home-school intervention link: “And then like I said, a couple more times just more focused on strategies of ways to help out at home. Things that were working well in the classroom, to try and reinforce what she’s doing in the class”. By doing this, parents and teachers were able to work as a team to increase the child’s academic achievement by utilizing consistent intervention strategies.

Reliance on Joint Examination of the Data

Parents relied on examining their child’s data with someone who is familiar with progress information for a number of reasons. For parents in this study, this occurred most frequently during direct contact with the teacher and secondarily with other sources of social support. Having face-to-face conversations about the data allowed parents to better make sense of unfamiliar educational terms, better understand their child’s individualized needs, and establish open lines of communication with their child’s teacher.

During Direct Contact with the Teacher

When receiving information about their child’s academic progress, parents desired to examine the data with the teacher to better understand the academic areas and their child’s specific progress. In fact, parents seemed to rely on this contact to make sense of their child’s data. Similarly, teachers desired to communicate in clear, parent-friendly ways. The quality of these face-to-face interactions is discussed below.

The first formal interaction that allowed for direct contact was during the beginning of the year parent-teacher conference. It was discovered that parents valued the face-to-face aspect of the parent-teacher conference. First, they appreciated the comprehensive information they received about their child. Second, they welcomed the

fact that teachers presented the CBM data and then explained the data to them. Finally, having direct contact with the teacher initially opened the lines of communication in the relationship for the rest of the year.

A major aspect of the conference situation that parents most appreciated was the ability to have face-to-face contact to discuss their child's progress. In meeting face-to-face with the teacher, using the CBM sheet as a guide, parents were able to gain a clearer understanding of their child's progress. Teachers described the data collected, but also placed the data in the context of the individual child. During the conference situation, teachers described what the numbers meant for the individual child in terms of their progress, their comparison to grade-level benchmarks, and strategies they used in the classroom to improve student performance, as Teacher 1 described:

We present the data because the scores itself on the CBM sheet with the DIBELS and the Fox in the Box and everything... Those scores are what we determine them as below grade level or on grade level. So we use those scores to present those to parents to say yep, your daughter/son whatever is on the way to second grade, or you know they're really below. This is how we're gonna support them here, maybe this is how you can support them at home so they can make progress.

Parents most valued receiving information about their child's academic progress when meeting with the teacher in person because the teacher tailored the conversation to the individual student's progress and needs. The teacher also helped parents to understand what the data meant in terms of their child's academic progress. Parent A stated that "it's helpful to meet with her because she puts kind of meat to the bones. You know, makes it make sense". Each conference seemed to follow the standard protocol, but was tailored to the individual student, which parents appreciated.

Another element of the conference situation that was helpful for parents was that the teachers did not rely on written text alone to deliver comprehensive progress

information. Harry (1992) argued that communicating with parents through written text assumes that parents understand the nature of their child's difficulties and the tools by which they are being assessed. Often times, this is not the case. Rather than sending home the initial CBM sheet, the teachers in this study met with each parent individually to relay a comprehensive picture of each child's functioning based on data. They also discussed the types of data collected and the rationale behind the collection of data throughout the year.

According to parents, relying on the data from the CBM sheet without a conference would have confused and frustrated them. Parent A explained: "I think probably it's one of those things that if you're a teacher, it's very simple and you look at this and you get it, but parents don't always. We don't really always understand what's coming home". Furthermore, Parent F said: "I rely on her handing this [CBM sheet] to me and telling me, or a follow up email with what this means, how she feels about the test, how she feels P is doing based on the other kids in the class or where she needs to be at that time of the year". Parent H added: "One of the things that, like from a parent perspective, this is probably a broader sense, these to me are very difficult to understand". For parents, examining data without personal interaction with the teacher can be confusing and overwhelming. As many parents stated, they often times do not understand educational jargon or the significance of the data. Consistent with previous research, the use of technical jargon paired with a high level of comprehension necessary to understand assessments is a common problem in traditional home-school communication practices (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Harry, 1992; Roit & Pfohl, 1984). Although the language included in the CBM sheet is different than that of report cards or

psychoeducational evaluations, it is apparent that parents still do not feel comfortable understanding and interpreting that data on their own. So, having a teacher present to describe the data and answer any questions is invaluable to parents.

In addition, having an initial in-person conference opened the lines of communication between the teacher and parent. The majority of parents stated that they wanted to be able to talk freely with the teacher about their concerns and questions. Parents also wanted to feel like their voices were being heard in the parent-teacher relationship. Parent I summarized this idea: “Just having been there and having that open dialect with the teacher. Just having you know, I can state how I feel about it, I can agree to disagree with you and not have to worry about whether my child is going to be treated different”. This is consistent with previous conclusions from researchers. Weiss and Edwards (1992) suggested that, through consistent and effective home-school communication practices, school staff are telling parents that they want to work collaboratively with them and that mutual problem-solving is in the best interest of the student. Beginning the year with a positive face-to-face conference also set the stage for straightening out any misconceptions. As Parent C stated: “I think that the very first meeting is the most valuable because it’s that, the one on one, there’s no chance of miscommunication. If there is, you’re able to clear it up. I think that the face to face is very important”. Establishing these clear lines of contact in a face-to-face meeting was valuable for parents so that they could ask questions and clarify confusion about their child’s data or the RtI process. Similarly, Mundschenk and Foley (1994) concluded that believing in these messages of collaboration and shared information allows for parents

and teachers to trust and respect each other, which will likely reduce future miscommunication.

All teachers expressed the desire to communicate with parents in a clear and understandable way, particularly during the initial conference. First, teachers wanted parents to be able to make sense of their child's data. They did this by attempting to use parent-friendly language that better explained the skills on the CBM sheet and their child's academic progress. In doing so, teachers tried not to use educational jargon.

Teacher 1 stated:

I try to deliver the information in a sense where they can understand. It's not that I'm trying to talk down to them by any means but DRS and the education field is very big on acronyms and so trying to deliver the information to them and make sure they have a really thorough understanding of what it is that their child is achieving, not achieving.

Teacher 3 also indicated that using basic, easily comprehensible language instead of technical jargon is important: "I don't ever want them to feel like I'm talking over their heads or give them too much information at a time, so I try to kind of slow it down and ask them to ask any questions if they're confused about anything". Teachers tried to make the information meaningful and usable for parents by describing the data in a way that made sense to parents. Teacher 3 indicated: "I just want to have it as clear as possible and have it be meaningful to the families so that they understand what it is that we're both testing and learning". To check for understanding, teachers also encouraged parents to ask questions and share their thoughts. Teacher 2 said, "I'm sharing it and I'm explaining it and asking them if they have any questions and that kind of thing" when describing her process of explaining the CBM data.

Overall, when receiving information about their child's academic progress, parents desired to examine the data with the teacher. These face-to-face meetings allowed

parents to make sense of the data, ask questions, and understand their child's individual needs. In fact, parents seemed to rely on this contact to make sense of their child's data. Likewise, teachers desired to communicate clearly and effectively with parents in a constructive manner.

With Other Sources of Social Support

Parents believed that interacting with the teacher was the most helpful way to make sense of their child's data; however, if their understanding was still unclear, they sought out other sources to help them make sense of the data. Other sources of social support helped parents better understand their child's academic progress information and supplemented interactions with the child's teacher. Experience with academic progress information from other children also supplemented their understanding.

Parents described seeking out a variety of sources to help enhance their understanding of their child's academic progress information. Such people included other parents, friends, and family members in the education field. First, it should be noted that parents looked to other sources of social support to clarify or enhance what their child's teacher had discussed with them, not to replace that information. Parent D said, "Yeah, and not in lieu of the teacher, just like, did that ever happen to you?". When seeking out the advice of others in their lives, parents specifically wanted the information described to them in a more comprehensible fashion. Despite the teachers' attempts to communicate in a clear, parent-friendly way, there was still a communication breakdown in several parent-teacher relationships. This often occurred due to the technical language that teachers used when describing data from the CBM sheet. Parent I described who she contacted after receiving the CBM sheets and her rationale for doing so:

My husband is a high school teacher so when I get this, I take this to whichever one of them that can help me the most. Which is usually his auntie because she's very good in this area and my husband is more in the high school. And she dissects this and breaks it down one by one for me...So with my sister in law, I can say okay, so in laymans terms, tell me what this means. What can I do to help him at home? And so she's able to break that down for me.

Parent H also suggested that she seeks out family members who are educational professionals to help her make sense of her child's data: "My mother in law actually is a school teacher, so she'll usually work with us too to explain them". By seeking out other sources of social support, parents were able to fill in the gaps of their understanding by talking to people who did not use technical or educational terms.

Seeking out other sources of social support also helped to reassure parents about their understanding of the information they received from their child's teacher. Parent F said, "I ask a lot of questions to the other parents about what kind of feedback are you getting from Teacher 1. You know, how do you perceive your child is doing? Well, you know, this is what I'm hearing, what are you hearing? When you read with your child, does this happen?". Parents wanted to feel a sense of comfort that they were receiving accurate information from the teacher. They also desired to check about the normality of their child's skills in relation to their peers' performance. Parent D was often asked questions like these from other parents due to her experiences in the classroom as an assistant. Parent D said:

They wanted reassurance. They want to make sure that they weren't overlooking something. And once a child becomes a reader and you're bringing home books, they're not nonsense words, so when they see that, well why are we still looking at nonsense words? They're a secure reader, what role does that play?

Beyond understanding their individual child's data, parents still wanted to understand the meaning behind assessing particular skills at a particular time and how the scores

from the CBM sheet interacted with each other. For most parents, these questions were still left unanswered after the initial conference with the teacher and they wanted “to make sure that they weren’t overlooking something”.

Another element outside of relationships with school staff that was helpful for parents when developing an understanding of their child’s academic progress data was their previous experience with data. In particular, several parents in this study had older children, many of whom attended DRS and had been assessed using CBM. Parents indicated that having previous experience with the CBM sheet made them more comfortable in their understanding of the data. Similar to other parents, Parent H identified experiences with other children as a significant factor in the development of her understanding of her child’s data, saying, “I think one of the advantages that I have over other people is that I have older kids... But it’s because I do have the experience, and a lot of people don’t have that to draw on”. When first exposed to the CBM sheet, parents remembered feeling confused. Parent B said:

And at that point, I had no knowledge of what these were. The first time I ever heard DIBELS, I thought what in the world is somebody talking about? But there was a, some sort of a handout I believe, a little booklet maybe that described, or on the back side of these, that gives a little bit better description of what those things are as well as...I was in the classroom on a regular basis with my other daughter. At that point I was in the classroom at least one day a week every week and had participated in seeing some of these and how that testing is done, so I had a little bit of knowledge.

However, as she became more familiar with CBM by reading about it and seeing it in action in the classroom, Parent B developed a better understanding of what the CBM sheet meant for her child. The same was true for Parent A, who said, “I think we just kind of know what those [skills measured on CBM sheet] mean. Maybe partially for our older son, we’ve seen this so many times”. The format of the CBM sheet and the

parent-teacher communication protocol has stayed pretty similar over the years, according to parents. This consistency has also aided in the development of their understanding of data. Parent D indicated this by saying, “And this, the CBM, at least the format is staying pretty similar”. Parent E added that “Being here and having the third child, you know it’s coming. They send home a form I think, you know October conferences are here, here is a list of dates and times that I’m willing to meet”. Overall, the familiarity with the CBM sheet and the consistency with the school-wide communication protocol helped parents to feel more comfortable with their understanding of their child’s data.

Establishing a Close, Trusting Relationship with Their Child’s Teacher

By interacting consistently and meaningfully with their child’s teacher, parents described how they developed trust in the teacher’s judgment about their description of their child’s academic achievement. Within this parent-teacher relationship, some parents also described seeing their child’s teacher as a source of emotional support for them while they developed an understanding of their child’s academic progress. Furthermore, parents continued to view their child’s teacher as a source of valuable information throughout their patterns of communication, particularly in terms of how to support student learning at home.

Trust in Teacher Judgment

A close parent-teacher relationship allowed parents to openly express their concerns and trust in the teacher’s judgment about their child’s achievement. This was particularly true when parents felt that the teacher understood their child as a unique individual. In spite of the data that they received, parents seemed to rely more on the teacher’s interpretation of the data than on the data themselves. In turn, they trusted

what the teacher told them because they relied on the teacher to help them make sense of the data. Parent A describes this trust in the teacher's judgment about her child:

She knows him. Which is very different than just seeing this (points to CBM sheet). She knows him and she knows I see this, and because I'm kind of, just the way my brain works, I go "okay..."...And I've asked her, like does he need a tutor or what do we need to do, because we'll do it. And she's like nope, I know the person and we're okay. This is what we're going to do about it.

Parent A said she trusted the teacher's opinion because "she sees it [the data] in context of our child probably more objectively than like, as a mom, you do. Because that's, when he's your child, it just makes you a little bit more concerned". Parent G provided another example of trusting in the teacher's judgment about her child's achievement. She said:

I go more by what the teacher tells me. I really do... If she would have said, I think we're looking at dyslexia, or I think we're looking at a learning disability, then my response would be completely different... If she would have said, he can't focus or he doesn't sit still or he doesn't pay attention or he's reading words backwards, then all of a sudden there's a different response...She's basically said all along, he's a little bit low but I'm not worried. And I think she was probably right. He just needed some time to developmentally get there.

Despite the data available to them, the teacher's trusted professional opinion was most valued. Through effective and collaborative home-school communication, parents and teachers were able to establish a trusting relationship that embraced each others' input. This approach paired with the CBM data also allowed for a decrease in parent-teacher miscommunication, which is consistent with past research (Mundschenk & Foley, 1994; Weiss & Edwards, 1992).

Teacher as a Source of Emotional Support

In some cases, parents felt that teachers were a source of emotional support, especially when their child was struggling. This support typically came in the form of

offering reassurance and comfort regarding their child's skills. When examining the child's data independently from the teacher, parents often worried and were seriously concerned about their child's progress. However, interacting with the teacher and hearing their rationale for the data presentation often calmed their anxiety. Parent A describes her initial reaction to receiving her child's CBM sheet and discovering that he was below grade-level in reading:

When we went to see her to ask her about some comments, she was much more reassuring and was able to say, than a piece of paper is, this is why I put that ...just letting us know what they saw at this point, or what she saw at this point, how concerned she was. She wasn't very... she said he was going to be fine. You know, she was just kind of reassuring that this is going to be fine but this is where he's technically showing up and this is how I'd like to address it.

In meeting with the teacher, parents were sometimes able to gain a sense of reassurance and comfort through more fully understanding their child's data.

Having a teacher who appeared to be an emotional support to parents was important since parents often discussed having emotional ties to their child's data, especially when their child was struggling. Such emotions included surprise, guilt, anxiety, and concern. Parent A described her reaction after hearing about her child's academic struggles by saying, "Academically we felt like we had stayed in good connection with her and knew we were surprised about some of [her] comments [about him]". While she had maintained good contact with her child's teacher, she did not realize that he was struggling in more than one academic area. Parent F was also surprised to hear about her child's struggles since no concerns were brought up the previous year. She said,

I was very surprised that she was struggling so much based on the feedback I got with Ms. C [last year]... So I guess it my head I was having a little bit of confusion about, is this different teacher perception, is this we

didn't spend enough time reading over the summer so maybe she was right where she needed to be in kindergarten? I guess I was just shocked to hear P was behind. I guess I had just assumed that how she was reading was how all her peers were reading.

When parents discovered that their child was struggling in an academic area, most mentioned the feeling of guilt. Parents felt guilty when their child was performing below grade-level because they felt responsible for their struggles. They thought that it might have been their fault, whether through a biological link to learning difficulties or through an environmental cause, such as not working with them enough at home. When Parent E saw her child's data, she asked herself, "So at first I was like, is it my fault?". She thought that maybe she had not advocated enough for her child or had not read enough with her at home. Parent F discussed her guilt by saying:

Is this we didn't spend enough time reading over the summer so maybe she was right where she needed to be in kindergarten? I had a baby over the summer so we had a lot of changes around our house and we probably didn't, we didn't read much at all. So a lot of guilt with maybe I've caused her to slip way behind.

These feelings of guilt were not uncommon for parents in this study, particularly when they were surprised by their child's below grade-level performance.

For a few parents in this study, they had older children to which to compare their child's academic performance. In looking back at the ways they viewed their children's data, they came to the realization that they paid more attention to their struggling child's data. Again, there was more emotion tied to that data than to the data of their high achieving children. Parent E said:

I think it really depends upon the child. Because my first two children are fairly high academic achievers. So when you get the scores, you know, I look at what's the assessment that, the name of the assessment, and you know, I'll read the back of what that is, and the teacher will then explain a little bit. Because my older two are so high achievers, you know you see that they're way above, and then you just kind of move on. You don't really

think too much about it. The problem now is A who's not like that, and now these numbers mean far more to me than they did for the other two, okay? Because there's a problem. So you know, that's when you have to start asking more questions.

Similar to Parent G, Parent E felt compelled to closely examine her child's data and ask questions. She felt that she needed more information for this child than for her high-achieving children, and she felt that the data were even more important in that situation. All in all, when parents had other, high-achieving children as a frame of reference for understanding their struggling child's progress, the data had more meaning for them. Parents felt responsible for looking at that data and understanding it since their child was performing below grade-level standards.

Teacher as a Source of Valuable Information

A trusting parent-teacher relationship allowed parents to feel comfortable to ask for the teacher's advice. And, much of this advice centered on strategies for supporting learning at home, which was a central topic in parent-teacher communication. Teachers were perceptive regarding parents' informational needs and their common questions, which likely aided in successful parent-teacher communication.

A key element of a successful parent-teacher relationship in this study centered on being provided with valuable information, particularly ideas for supporting learning at home. Teachers often recommended online resources, as Parent E describes:

I've been given online homework, or not homework, but games, homework type games like Ticket to Read that she likes to do at home and a couple of other ones, I know how to get on those from the webpage. Those are all accessible to me from the DRS webpage and the grade level page.

In other cases, though, parents were given specific, academic strategies to help with their child's specific difficulty. Parent E said:

When I talked to Teacher 2, she did give me some sheets to work with her, so what I did is I do a dry erase board and I have maybe different blends or different vowel sounds and I'll say words and she needs to find the column in which it goes. It helps her with her spelling and try to sort what's making the long /a/...what word makes the long /a/ sound or the long e sound.

Parents appreciated that ability to have a personal influence on their child's progress by working closely with them at home. In addition, it gave them a sense of relief to know that they were doing what they could to help. When they received advice regarding ways to support learning at home, all parents in this study indicated that they embraced that knowledge to help their child in any way possible. Parent I is a good reference point for this. She said:

And when we get that information, we make our house what he needs. Like I know he was in the beginning having hard times with the...I don't know what the words are called, they're not WOW words because that was kindergarten, but whatever the words are that they're working on. You know, I asked Teacher 2 to send me a list of them home and we put them on index cards. We tape them to the walls and the bathroom will be a certain amount, the dining room area will be a certain amount, in his room there's a certain amount, in the front room there's a certain amount so they're everywhere. So he has to go and find these words as we call them out to him and he has to use them in a sentence and he has to break down the sounds. So we do our best to, once we get this information, to try to keep up with what Teacher 2 is doing at school. So we try to do that at home as well.

Teachers were also aware that parents want to know more. The three questions that teachers indicated that parents most often ask are: "What do the CBM skills mean?", "How does my child compare to other students?", and "What can I do at home to help?". Teachers listened to the parents, recognized common patterns in the questions that parents ask them, and gained a sense about parents' common needs: which allowed teachers to guide their discussions at conferences and during in-person meetings.

Teacher 3 said that parents “sometimes just don’t get the numbers or don’t get what the skill is that’s being focused on” when discussing data from the CBM sheet. Parents often asked questions about the reading skills themselves, such as decoding or fluency. They wanted to understand what the skill was in order to help their child at home. When parents had difficulty understanding the meaning behind the skills, teachers typically gave a verbal and written explanation and also encouraged parents to ask questions. Teacher 2 explained her process for answering this question:

Well they do ask, “What does it mean?” And I’ll talk to them and give them an explanation but I will also refer them to the back [of the CBM sheet]. Because I will tell them, you know, when you get home, you’re not going to remember all the things that I say. So back here is a written explanation. And then I tell them, you know, call me. If you get home and can’t remember exactly what it means, you’re trying to explain it to the other parent and you just can’t remember, just give me a call.

This process was common for the entire first grade teaching team. They attempted to give parents a variety of ways to understand data and encouraged them to ask questions when necessary.

When examining the CBM sheet in conjunction with the teacher, parents also wanted to know how their child was performing in relation to their peers. Teacher 1 said this was apparent during conversations with parents as well as when they volunteered in the classroom:

They always want to compare. Parents always want to compare like, you know, are they at the top of their class, bottom of the class, you know? They’re always worried and I can see that when they come in to volunteer. They’re always like, cause I always have parents sit and read with kids or at a center, they’re always thinking, oh man, my son’s better than this group or lower than this group.

While parents were interested in this information, they did not feel it was answered by the data on the CBM sheet.

Teachers sometimes expressed hesitation regarding home support for learning, questioning parents' abilities to effectively help their child at home. Teacher 1 described this concern by saying, "They also ask like what can I do at home? And sometimes it's hard to answer that question because when they don't have the education background, it's hard to tell them you know, things they can really do at home". It appeared that teachers sometimes attempted to determine the parents' level of knowledge before providing them with strategies to support learning at home. And interestingly, during SST meetings, teachers mentioned only a few parents in this study as helping their child at home, despite the fact that every parent reported supporting learning at home.

Realizing the "Whole Picture" of Their Child's Academic Progress

Finally, parents developed an understanding of their child's academic progress information by realizing the "whole picture" of their child's academic achievement. This came from combining the academic data they had received from the school with their own observations and teacher observations.

Use of Data in Conjunction with Parent and Teacher Observations

Although the CBM sheet was an important source of information when developing an understanding of their child's academic progress, parents suggested that they also used observations to make sense of their child's progress. Many parents described this combination of sources as "layers" of understanding, as Parent D best described:

And this [CBM sheet] definitely helps. I think again it paints another layer on how the child is developing, but I also think sometimes you know, the situation or the behavior or the group of kids, the environment, who did the testing, also is something that you extrapolate from that conversation you have with the teacher.

In terms of comparing the data to parent observations, Parent B said, "And it kind of confirms again what I'm seeing at home in terms of where, what areas are difficult,

where we struggle, and what things are a little bit more easy". Parent E echoed this sentiment, saying, "I use that in conjunction with what I see personally you know on a day to day level with her. I think what I do is I watch through her reading what she's bringing home in her home reading and then I compare that to what I see". Data from the CBM sheet helped parents to confirm or disconfirm what they were seeing at home. Data also helped them to hypothesize about why their child was struggling. For example, Parent C said, "He struggles in the beginning, and it's been like this since preschool we noticed. But usually around, I don't know, usually around now, January maybe, he seems to pick it up and start focusing on where he needs to be". Parent E hypothesized that the timed circumstance of CBM had a negative impact on her child's performance by saying:

I know she doesn't like to be timed. If she experienced some sort of discomfort or whatever, the location, the person or just the fact that she's timed, she'll start doing this (fidgets). Well that will affect her score. That's important too. They might say that that's not a problem, that's just a poor test taker, and that's something else you can work on too is getting used to being timed.

Finally, parents used the data from the CBM sheet to plan for home support for learning. Parent G said, "It's just more this tells me that my son is having trouble and I need to do something about it more than, oh I've got to work on his nonsense words or I've gotta work on...". Parent I saw patterns in her child's data on previous CBM sheets and knew what were his areas of difficulty to focus on at home. All in all, for parents, their child's scores were just one element in making sense of their child's academic progress. But, the data did help them to formulate hypotheses about their child's achievement and plan for intervention.

Another element that was helpful for some parents was classroom observations. One major aspect of their child's progress that parents were able to discover during their presence in the classroom was their child's progress relative to their peers. Observing their child in the classroom helped to answer that question, which was left unanswered by the CBM sheet. Parent G stated that "getting in there and seeing him with the other kids is helpful. It helps me know that he's really just pretty much a normal first grader. It's not like he's incredibly behind or ahead, you know what I mean?". This aided in parents developing a better, "whole picture" view of their child's functioning, which Parent D alluded to in this quote: "And then in the classroom, it might not be discussion about him, but it might be kind of a whole picture...kind of how kids are doing and kind of get an idea where he is in that". Parents were able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their child's progress by seeing them in the classroom.

Parents also used their classroom observations to facilitate support for learning at home. Parent B suggested that being in the classroom helped her learn ways to help her child at home when she was struggling. She said:

I've been in the classroom several times in the past couple of months on Wednesdays. That's a day that I'm available, so kind of observing some of the strategies that she was using with reading in particular and having a...when J's gotten stuck in an area, kind of having, what kind of cues to help her be able to sound out words and things like that.

Parent D was a classroom assistant in the previous year's first grade class and volunteered in her child's class this year. Parent D indicated, "I kind of got a good picture of what was happening and how I could make things at home be supportive of him learning". Overall, parents saw real benefits to being present in their child's classroom, including gaining a better understanding of their child's progress relative to their peers and learning ways to help their child at home. This is consistent with

research by DeCusati & Johnson (2004), the results of which suggest that “learning about classroom goals and how to complement this at home seem to be important forms of parent involvement at the first-grade level” (p. 243).

Interestingly, teachers also relied on data in conjunction with observations when describing student academic progress. Although the CBM sheet provided a framework for communicating with parents, teachers often supplemented their conversations with what they saw on a day-to-day basis, especially if the data did not present the most comprehensive view of student’s achievement. Teachers supplemented objective, number-focused data with their own qualitative observations. This also alluded to the idea of CBM data and observations as layers for developing understanding, as Teacher 3 indicated by saying she uses “both my observation of working with them combined with their scores”. Teacher 1 said:

Day to day interaction. I mean I just, I feel like teachers, well I don’t know I don’t want to say all, but I feel like teachers are intuitive by nature...It’s just, day to day, getting, having them rich with diverse texts in reading, leveled texts, texts with background knowledge, texts that they don’t have any background knowledge on. For math, it’s a lot of hands on so I can watch them and see where they’re missing a step...So to me it’s the every day. It’s the everyday informal observations.

Teachers felt that their observations helped to “fill out” the data and present the individual child rather than numbers on a page. Like Parent A said, speaking with her child’s teacher helped her “put meat to the bones” of the CBM sheet. Teacher 3 mirrored this by saying “I actually could tell them more for him through observation than scores. I could give them nuances of what he was now doing that he wasn’t doing in the beginning of the year”. Because the numbers sometimes did not adequately describe the unique individual, teachers would supplement this information with their own observations.

Presentation of a Balanced View About Their Child's Progress

Parents and teachers in this study were asked to discuss student progress based on data from the CBM sheet. When asked to describe each student's academic progress, teachers presented a balanced view about the student's achievement while emphasizing their positive characteristics. Interestingly, the parents explained their child's data in remarkably similar ways to the teacher. They appeared to internalize and take on the teacher's description as their own. It was discovered that, for parents of children who struggled the most, their greatest desire for their child was to be on grade-level. And interestingly, the parents of students receiving Tier 3 services did not seem to recognize the intensity of their child's struggles based on the data alone.

Parents often began their conversations by starting to talk about their child's area of difficulty. However, this was typically followed by a discussion about their strengths. Parent C provides a typical description of how parents described their child's progress:

He seems to struggle a little bit in math. Er, I'm sorry, in reading. But he excels in math. He likes math much more than reading. But he is an excellent reader. I think it's just finding what interests him. When he finds something that interests him, and I think that's true with most people, it's easier for him to, you know, get into the story and read and that kind of thing.

Parent F gave another common response in how parents described their child's progress by saying:

She was struggling. She was below even the number they list as minimally achieving for first grade with reading... Math is very easy to her. She just gets it so far. She can do her homework by herself.. And the teacher on the assessment says she's where she needs to be. Like she's not advanced per se, but she's where she needs to be. And in class she's a leader when it comes to math.

Although her child was not above grade-level in mathematics, she mentioned this during conversation, especially after she had discussed her child's reading performance, in

which she struggled. Parents rarely focused on only their child's struggles, but this did occur when discussing the data, which was clearly an emotional experience for them. Parent E is a good example of this, because she expressed the most intense emotional reactions to her child data. For her, her child's lack of progress made her sad and worried, and she frequently mentioned this. She felt partially responsible for her child's struggles, and often brought this up during the interview. When asked to describe her child's academic progress, she said:

A is considered like a gray area child. She's not low enough to get the services that somebody takes out and helps her, and so I have to work with her at home...She's behind. And I'm hoping that we hit second grade ready, but not being able to read well means that she can't read her math homework, you know. That affects her math score. So yes, she's not where she needs to be by any stretch of the imagination.

Overall, most parents did focus on presenting their child's strengths and weaknesses, unless their emotions tied to their child's data overwhelmed them. In that case, they focused on their child's area of difficulty.

Parents presented a balanced but more frequently positive view about their child. In particular, they emphasized the amount of progress that their child had made that year. This typically was discussed in the context of their child's struggling area. Parent A depicted this, saying:

I can tell you the difference between the first and the second quarter which she kind of was saying to us is, he was still showing below grade level second quarter, but she was really good about showing us, like had gone, he's tripled his score here. So in other words, the Fox in the Box, he's gone from 10 to 30. So he's still not quite where they want him to be but he's doing much...the growth she said was pretty impressive and...that's not the word, encouraging to her.

Parent F added, "So then in the testing in January, she did a lot better. She still falls below grade level, but definitely is catching up to where she needs to be based on what

Teacher 1 said to me”. When examining their child’s data, it was apparent that parents wanted to find the positive. They often talked about their child’s strengths or the progress that they had made in a particular area, despite their child’s struggles.

Interestingly, teachers also revealed that they attempted to present a “whole-child” view of each student while emphasizing the child’s positive qualities. This included presenting a comprehensive view of students beyond the data alone. Teacher 3 described this comprehensive, “whole child” picture she wanted to deliver:

And if there were areas I was concerned, I would say that’s how I’m working with these, but there are so many other skills I picked up in and he would show me as he was decoding his guided reading levels that he was being able to decode new words. So I would describe how I could observe in context that he was actually doing these things so that these test scores didn’t really align with my observations of him.

All teachers emphasized this “whole child” view and wanted to highlight student progress. Teacher 2 said: “But what I try to point out to the parents is if the gap is closing and if they’re getting closer to the targets”. Teacher 3 echoed this by saying that she wanted “to make sure that they [parents] get as much positive feedback as possible, especially initially”. Focusing on the child’s progress and positive attributes assisted teachers in building solid, constructive parent-teacher communication patterns. And, because parents relied on examining the data in conjunction with their child’s teacher to make sense of their academic progress, it is likely that they remembered the teacher’s presentation of the data. The ways that teachers presented the academic progress information really resonated with the parents and became their own description of the data in turn. Parents and teachers presented their views about student progress in remarkably similar ways.

When discussing their child's academic achievement, parents often expressed the desire for their child to be on grade-level. This was especially true for parents when they interpreted their child's struggles to be severe. Parent H's child had been receiving Tier 3 intervention all year, and she recognized that he was not meeting grade-level expectations. While coming to terms with this, she said:

I think academics are very important, but I think they're one component of a child. And so I think that it's important for a child to excel academically, however, I say that at the same time that I would rather them be well balanced than excel academically...[I] see that education is very important, but to make sure that he's on grade level. He doesn't have to excel, he doesn't have to be like the top 1% but that he is on grade level and that he is where he needs to be to continue to progress without being stressed out about or feeling like he's always behind too.

Parent I echoed this sentiment. Her child was retained in kindergarten and had been receiving Tier 3 intervention all year. Parent I stated, "And it's not just about education for me. It's about you know, his mind, his body, his heart, it's about everything for me". For these parents, it was less important for their child to be above grade-level and more important for them to be average and exhibiting other positive qualities.

Interestingly enough, the same parents of children receiving Tier 3 services did not recognize the intensity of their child's struggles from looking at the CBM sheet alone. Although both students had either been retained or were performing significantly below grade-level benchmarks, Parent H said, "And struggles, I say he's probably just a little bit below some of the other kids". Parent I also said:

Yeah cause I would think below would be like...he's supposed to get 40, he got 20. Or 15. You know he was supposed to get 20 and 8, he got 11 and 12. So I would think 6 and 7 would be bad. Or he's supposed to get 18 and he got 19, he's supposed to get...I would think it should have been some significantly different numbers than this because then they're like numbers away.

Both of these parents expressed a desire to better understand what “on grade-level” meant in terms of the interaction of the CBM skills. In addition, neither of these parents were able to see their child in the classroom setting, so they were not able to gain an understanding of their child’s progress relative to their peers through the data or observations. Based on the data alone, these parents were not able to determine how significant their child’s reading difficulties actually were.

Parents’ Unmet Informational Needs

Despite parents’ overall positive view of the ways that they developed an understanding of their child’s academic progress information, they also expressed a number of unmet needs. In particular, parents desired to be informed of their child’s difficulties as early as possible, which many did not feel happened. Parents also wanted to gain a better understanding of CBM, including the skills measured and the classroom assessment schedule. Not surprisingly, parents also desired more information regarding how to support learning at home. Overall, parents wanted their concerns to be listened to, and when that occurred, most parents seemed satisfied with the information that they were given regarding their child’s academic progress.

A major concern expressed by parents related to hearing of their child’s academic difficulties late. In previous studies, parents also reported that they were not informed of their child’s lack of academic progress until the situation had become considerably worse (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Jayanthi et al., 1992, as cited in Harniss et al., 2001). Parent I expressed this concern best by saying:

Having two kids, going to school myself, and having a full time job, I don’t want to have to come to you every single time to see how he’s doing. I want, if you notice something, to let me know right away...I don’t want this [CBM sheet] to tell me what my son is doing during the year. I don’t want to

wait until I get this [CBM sheet]. I want to know, like if you notice this on the 3rd week of school just starting, I want to know then.

Parents expressed the desire to be informed of any difficulty as soon as the teacher became aware of it. They also wanted to be informed about it through face-to-face, personalized communication with their child's teacher rather than through printed data.

Parents recognized the importance of identifying academic difficulties early, as Parent E explained here: "I do know that the earlier you get somebody help, the faster you can resolve the problem. So if there's any indication that there is something going on, you know, I want to know as fast as possible". Parents wanted to be informed as early as possible so that they could help their child, either at home or through other services. Parent I indicated, "I think at times I could have been told sooner rather than later so that would have allowed me ample opportunity and more time to work with him on certain things". Parent E said: "The turnaround...I'm just like, oh my goodness. It's April, the end of April, she's going to be tested in three weeks! And I can't help her! Three weeks is not enough time!". Regardless of what they did with the information, parents wanted to be informed of academic difficulties early.

It was discovered that parents also desired more comprehensive information regarding CBM. They wanted to gain a better understanding about the CBM, including the test requirements and the assessment schedule in the classroom. Many parents expressed the desire to see the tests as a way to get a better picture about what their child was expected to do. Or, as Parent D said, "What kind of tests can my kids expect?". She said:

And I'm not sure if its about, you know they don't want to breach what the words are, but maybe you could see last year's or 6 years ago questions after they release them. So I'm curious if they can ever release those old

books so the teachers, I mean parents and teachers, can kind of both know what those assessments involve.

Parent E echoed this sentiment, saying, “Show me the words. Show me the test. And it would be interesting”. Besides gaining a better understanding about the skills measured by CBM, which would be helpful for supporting learning at home, parents felt that seeing the CBM data sheets would provide them with additional information about their child. Several parents suggested that background information, including their child’s test-taking behaviors and the testing environment, would be important to know. Parent G said that “it would be nice to know in what context he’s taking these types of tests... Or even when it’s going to be. But I know they can’t always even know that”. Parent E said:

And I also think that it would be useful that since this is a snapshot in time, if there were notes from the individual who assesses. Is A, you know what is her demeanor right now? Does she appear tired? Was she sniffing? Does she seem nervous?...When I asked Teacher 2, she goes yeah that’s a very good question in why this isn’t changing, but she really couldn’t give me you know, a why. I really do think it takes a, let’s look at the actual test. Let’s pull it up and see what she did. And I think that would be very, very telling you know.

Parent D, who was a classroom assistant in a previous year and had been involved in assessing children using CBM, found it valuable to have this kind of information. She said, “It’s not always clear unless you really can see that book or you’ve helped with literacy that why decoding is important or you know, what role sight words play in a kid becoming more fluent”.

Consistent with previously discussed results, parents expressed the desire to know more about ways to support learning at home. Or, as Parent I said, “Just give me some insight for information”. Parent F suggested that this was often on her mind, saying “And then I guess the next most important thing I’m always gonna want to know is what can I do at home in this specific area”.

It was obvious that parents in this study required different levels of information to work with their child at home. Sometimes this was due to lack of knowledge about how to help their child and other times it was due to their intense concern for their child's academic struggles that led them to seek out additional information. Parents felt that it was necessary for them to help their child at home and that their achievement partially depended on that. Parent E stated, "I have to work with her at home. And if I can't figure out the problem, I can't help her". A few parents, such as Parent D, understood the primary areas of reading and the ways that these skills combined to develop a "good reader". Other parents, though, did not understand the language of the CBM sheet and felt lost when trying to help their child at home in that area. Parent E said, "We can't help him with this stuff at home because we don't know what it represents. We don't know how to line it up". Parents desired recommendations that were more specific and tailored to their child's individual needs.

A recurring message that parents delivered when discussing their unmet needs for communication was that they just wanted to be heard. They wanted their concerns to be listened to. When they did not feel that this happened, parents became upset and frustrated. When this did occur, though, despite their child's academic progress, parents appeared satisfied with the parent-teacher communication patterns. Parent E told her story by saying:

I just have to let you know that, you gotta be on guard. There's something wrong, I don't know what it is. And then you know, and I know Teacher 2 because we go to church together. And she said, "Well we're a great place for this"...But then she started to slip! And then in January she goes, "Well this tells me now we need to be hyper aware of it." And I'm like, "Okay." So a little frustration on my part just because, you know, I've sensed and I've communicated that I think that there's a problem, so...

Parent E felt that her child could have been receiving additional services earlier on if the teacher had listened to her concerns and trusted her opinions about her child.

On the other hand, for parents who felt like their concerns were listened to, their satisfaction with communication was high. Although Parent H's child struggled throughout first grade and received Tier 3 services all year, she expressed that she still felt that her voice was heard when discussing her child's needs with the teacher. She said:

They have taken the information because in particular I met with them I guess the beginning of the school year to talk about what our concerns were going into first grade. So I think they took the concerns that we had and talked with Teacher 3 and we talked with Teacher 3 and we were able to use those then to target areas for him that we felt like he needed to be focused on. They've been good about listening to what we had to say and taking it into consideration as they made decisions.

It was clear throughout conversations with Parent H that her desire was for her voice to be heard. As long as her concerns were taken into account during communication with school staff, she seemed satisfied, despite the fact that her child still struggled in the classroom.

Overall, parents expressed desires for communication about their child's academic progress information. They hoped that the information would be delivered as early as possible so that they could seek help for them. They also wished that they had a better understanding of CBM and what kinds of tests their child was taking. Also, many indicated that they still wanted more information about ways to support learning at home. Finally, parents particularly wanted their concerns to be listened to and their voices to be heard when communicating about their child's academic progress.

The Ways in Which Parents Participate in Educational Decision-Making for Their Child

The second guiding research question for the study addressed parent participation in educational decision-making during an Rtl service model. When analyzing the data related to this question, it was most helpful to describe it within the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. According to Bronfenbrenner, human development occurs within the "progressively more complex reciprocal interactions" between an individual and their surrounding environments (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 4). Furthermore, "the ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 5). These nested structures include the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the exosystem. The microsystem is the immediate environment in which a pattern of activities is experienced by the developing individual. The mesosystem is a system of microsystems that includes the processes taking place between several settings in which the individual is involved. And, the exosystem includes the events that occur indirectly, but also influence the environments of the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). To describe the results for this research question, the microsystem is defined as the parents' determination of their level of involvement in decision-making based on their child's needs, the mesosystem includes experiences within the parent-teacher dyad, and the exosystem is comprised of parents' interactions within the school system. Please see the following figure for a visual display of the themes represented in the second research question.

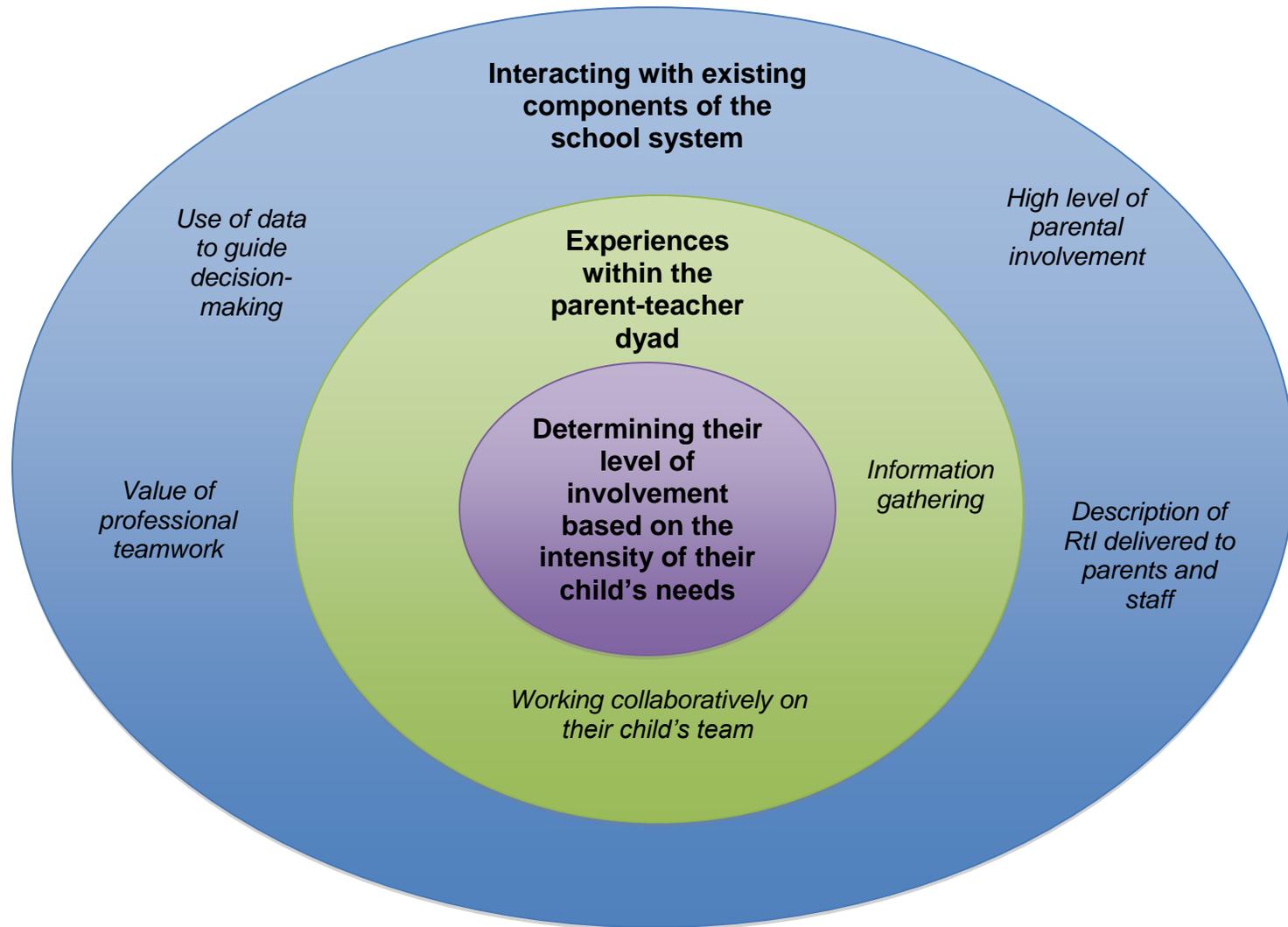


Figure 3-2. How do parents of children receiving intervention participate in educational decision-making during an RtI process?

Determining Their Level of Involvement Based on the Intensity of Their Child's Needs

At the individual and microsystemic level, parents' discussions indicated an assessment of the intensity of their child's specific needs. In doing so, this gave parents a better idea of how much they needed to be involved in educational decision-making for their child. Parents who felt that their child's needs were significant, or very intense sought the most opportunities to be involved in decision-making. The reasons for this are detailed below.

Most parents in this study had other children to which to compare their first grade child's academic performance. In many of these cases, older children in the family were performing on or above grade-level. This situation allowed parents to express the differences in the way they view their child's academic progress information and how their involvement in decision-making is different regarding their first grade child who was performing below grade-level. Parent E began addressing this topic by reiterating that some parents do not care or do not worry about their child's performance, but that this is not the case for her. She said, "And some parents don't care. Honestly, they don't...but I'm like really nervous about it." Parent E then detailed the differences in decision-making for her on- and below grade-level children:

I think it really depends upon the child. Because my first two children are fairly high academic achievers. So when you get the scores, you know, I look at what's the assessment, the name of the assessment, and you know, I'll read the back of what that is, and the teacher will then explain a little bit. Because my older two are so high achievers, you know you see that they're way above, and then you just kind of move on. You don't really think too much about it. The problem now is A who's not like that, and now these numbers mean far more to me than they did for the other two, okay? Because there's a problem. So you know, that's when you have to start asking you know, more questions.

For Parent E, understanding that her child was struggling in reading led her to ask more questions and seek additional information to inform her decision-making. For this parent, that information included how to support learning at home as well as understanding the classroom interventions. It also meant volunteering more in the classroom and observing her child's performance in relation to her peers.

Other parents also expressed this idea that they wanted to be more involved in decision-making when it involved their struggling child as opposed to their child that was on grade-level. Parent H said, "I mean if he were on grade level, I'm good with that because I don't have to need him to have to be in the top 1 percentile. If he's on grade level, then I'm not as concerned as if he's below grade level". Parent G also explained that she paid more attention to the data of her child who was performing below grade-level, and also made sure that they were working with him at home to remediate his difficulties:

[My older son] I never worried, he was always just really above grade level, so I never really looked at it. Bad Mom. But with D, I need to look at it because he's not necessarily really above grade level. And actually at least at the beginning of the year, below grade level...I need to look at it because he's not necessarily really above grade level. And actually at least at the beginning of the year, below grade level...But I will say that I've been much more religious about after school reading with D. I mean, yes I did it with [my older son] and I still do it, but you know, I try not to miss any days. And you know, try to do at least once on the weekend.

Overall, for parents of students who were receiving academic intervention services, it was most important for them to closely examine their child's data—more closely than they would have for the children who were performing on or above grade-level. After understanding that their child was struggling, this also led them to desire better involvement in educational decision-making for their child. This involvement in decision-

making consisted of asking questions, volunteering in the classroom, seeking the teacher's advice, and helping their child at home.

Experiences Within the Parent-Teacher Dyad

At the mesosystemic level, parents' participation in educational decision-making was also influenced by experiences within the parent-teacher dyad. Specifically, parents identified information gathering and working collaboratively on their child's team as their primary roles in decision-making within the relationship with their child's teacher. In terms of information gathering, asking questions and hypothesizing about their child's struggles were two of the main responsibilities that parents discussed. In terms of working collaboratively on their child's team, parents saw themselves as just "one piece of the puzzle" on the school-based decision-making team. To fulfill their role on this team, parents felt obligated to help their child at home.

Information Gathering

Consistent with past research (Barton, et al., 1984; Lusthaus et al., 1981), it was discovered that parents in this study continued to play a passive role in decision-making in that they identified asking questions or seeking additional information as a major role that they play in their child's education. For parents in this study, they primarily asked questions about skills on the CBM sheet, their child's data, and how to support learning at home. One goal of discovering this additional information was so that parents could actively participate in the problem-solving process regarding their child's struggles. Most parents felt that they could not sufficiently participate in educational decision-making for their child without fully understanding their academic progress, which is also consistent with past research (Barton et al., 1984).

A major role that parents indicated that they play in educational decision-making for their child is asking questions to their child's teacher and other school staff. Parent E described this best by saying, "I think that's important...sometimes you don't know the right questions to ask that would help your child, and that's important". She further stated the goal for asking questions and seeking out additional information, which is that it facilitate more effective participation in decision-making. She described:

I'm really one of those, you know, parents who is all in it all the time. Where did this come from, why it has happened. Tell me more, tell me more. Because with that information, it gives you opportunity for decision making and if you don't have all the information, then you know, you may not make the right choices for your child. Or you may make them too late, like I feel like I...I should have started this earlier. And I didn't.

Parents also asked questions to clarify information that they received about their child.

For some parents, this included information about classroom interventions, and for others, the discussion revolved around retention. Parent H discussed some of the clarifying questions she asked when her child was in danger of retention:

For me, from a parent's perspective, a lot of the question, and I've been very open and honest about it in discussions, have had to do with, 'What does this information tell me about where he is and where he needs to be grade wise? Does he need to be retained? Does he need to go on? Why does he need to go on or why does he need to be held back? At the end of the year, what is this going to tell me?'... So certainly in first grade, we've been more, I've been more vocal about my feelings on whether when we need to assess him at the end of the year. There needs to be the hard questions asked. 'Does he need to be retained? Is this telling us, you know, do we want to continue to move him on at below grade-level status or does he need to do first grade again?'

Without fully understanding the requirements for retention and whether her child was falling far enough behind to be retained, Parent H did not feel like she knew how to participate in that decision-making process. Again, a lack of understanding about this information led to inaction or uncertainty about participation.

For other parents, questions that they asked centered around teacher's advice for home or summer intervention or the CBM data. Parent G described her decisions about summer intervention for her child:

If the third quarter is looking as good as Teacher 2 says it looks, maybe we'll even wait until the fourth quarter to decide you know, are we going to hire a reading tutor over the summer? Are we going to get some remedial help?...And I'll talk to Teacher 2 about whether she thinks we should to a tutor type of thing or whether I could just continue what I'm doing over the summer.

Parent G looked to the advice of her child's teacher to decide on appropriate intervention strategies for her child when he was not in school. Parents also asked questions to teachers about how to help their child at home, as discussed extensively in the previous section. Parent I summed up this idea by saying, "What does it mean? What does it do? How do I as a parent address it at home?...Just give me some insight for information". Parents yearned for additional information about how to help their child at home, particularly in a way that would streamline classroom-home interventions.

Parent B indicated:

Like I said, just have as many different ways of reinforcing the skills as we can have, because we know we gotta work on them... Again, kind of the areas that are weak and strategies that we can utilize to kind of boost those skills. Not only in school, but particularly at home so that I know what kinds of things to do to try to improve her performance in school as well as just overall.

Parents also wanted to clarify information found on the CBM sheet. Sometimes, this was regarding their individual child's data, and other times it was regarding the skills measured by the CBM sheet. Parent H indicated that she sought out answers when she did not understand by saying, "When this comes home, we just like look at it and if we have questions, we address them with Teacher 3". Again, asking questions was a major role that parents suggested they play in decision-making because this often led to more

effective participation in decision-making. Without sufficient and clear information, parents were not comfortable or able to participate fully in educational decision-making.

After gaining a better understanding about their child's academic progress information, parents often hypothesized about their child's struggles. By combining information that they received from the CBM sheet, their own observations, and teacher observations, parents felt comfortable discussing some reasons for why they thought that their child was struggling in an academic area. Some parents even discussed these hypotheses with their child's teacher, which suggests a more active role in the problem-solving process for their individual child. The reason that some parents looked more critically at their child's data was because "once you find a pattern, then you know how to solve the problem", as Parent E said. Some hypotheses that parents were suggesting included processing speed deficits, behavioral difficulties, and difficulties with a specific reading skill. Parent B and Parent E describe their hypotheses here:

Parent B: Again she's, was way, well not way, but below level here at the beginning and now she's kind of moved up again, a little above where on grade level scoring is. Still struggling a little bit with the DIBELS fluency, that being able to get it out more quickly, which was again, *that* one is kind of the area where we're most, more concerning I would say from a parent standpoint. Given sufficient amount of time, she'll get there, but being able to do it in a test format or something else, it's speed. It can be an issue.

Parent E: Take, for instance, she's on grade level here for reading. Her grade level for reading continues to improve but her decoding has remained exactly the same and her DIBELS are not...so how is she moving up grade level in reading when she can't decode? So if you look...it would be interesting to look at the paper and say okay it looks like she's got all the sight words down, it seems where she didn't understand she's either skipping or miscuing or something like that. Or if there was something like, every blend, she has a problem, or everything with a long vowel. Once you find a pattern, then you know how to solve the problem.

Although it was not common across all parents, some parents did feel comfortable hypothesizing about their child's struggles. Those parents also felt comfortable asking

more detailed questions about their child's progress, expressing their concerns to the teacher, and attempting to participate in the problem-solving process with their child's teacher. For them, asking questions appeared to lead to more active involvement in educational decision-making for their child.

Working Collaboratively on the Child's Team

Another role that parents played in decision-making and also desired more of was working collaboratively with school staff who were members of their child's decision-making team. Parents described that their primary duty in collaboration is supporting learning at home, particularly in terms of continuing and streamlining classroom interventions at home. Parents, especially those of students receiving Tier 3 intervention, expressed a desire to feel like a member of the team and work conjointly with their child's teacher and other school staff.

As described extensively in previous sections, parents felt obligated to help their child at home. They felt that this was the major way to collaborate and work with the school to enhance their child's achievement. As Parent G said, "I see it as this is just part of your job as a parent is to provide those experiences that they might need to get them to where they need to be". Specifically, parents found it important to join forces with their child's teacher to understand what they could do at home that would be consistent with classroom interventions. Parent H expressed this notion by saying, "We can see a lot of the times some of the same...A lot of times we'll mirror some of the things that we've tried at home with him...we encounter some of the same kinds of difficulties that she does and so we're able to take kind of some of those strategies and try to apply them at home". Parent E echoed this idea, saying, "If I know what you're doing, I can probably do some of it at home". Overall, the sense of teamwork that

parents felt in regards to decision-making was often centered around home-school collaboration about intervention strategies.

Parents of students receiving Tier 3 intervention services discussed the idea that they feel responsible for their child, despite them being at school for most of the day. Because of this, they wanted their voice to be heard in decisions and they wanted to work in conjunction with school staff during the decision-making process. Parent I emphasized her role of being her child's strongest supporter during decision-making. She said, "I'm C's advocate. I'm his voice...So for me, it's hard for me to say okay black and white, this is how it goes. Whereas it's easier for them because they're his teacher and that's all that they are is his teacher. So for me I have to bring out the gray because I believe in the in between because it's my child". Parent I wanted to be assured that her opinion was taken into account during decision-making meetings, since she was able to provide information to school staff that teachers could not. Parent H also suggested that parents have valuable information to offer up about their child during decision-making by saying, "I see our role, the roles in his education as to be able to since we see him at home as well, to complement the resources that are available here and making decisions as to what's best for him and how he can be academically successful". For Parent H, working in conjunction with school staff also meant that she was assured that her child was receiving the most effective and comprehensive services available to him. She said:

We are certainly more invested because he's our child, so we're personally vested in his success and academics, but most importantly, our role I think is to try to be able to take the resources that are available and kind of see what works best for him. Because I think ultimately we feel responsible for what the end, what happens with him academically because we're his parents. So we're responsible, but to be able to utilize the resources. So I

see us, I see our role certainly as a major role because we are his parents, but we are the kind of parents that we've utilized all the resources that are available for him as well.

Because she felt responsible as a parent to ensure his success, she sought out all opportunities available to help her child achieve academically. For her, working in conjunction with school staff meant that her voice and opinions were heard, and that her child was receiving the best services possible.

For Parents H and I, the parents of the two students in this study who were receiving Tier 3 intervention, two major decisions that they faced were participation in the summer reading program (SAIL) and the possibility of their child's retention. For these parents, their involvement in decision-making was quite different. Parent I felt that the summer school decision was made without parental input, as she received a letter saying that he would need to attend. She said, "They just send you a letter in the mail. They don't meet with you about it". For Parent H, the decision felt more collaborative. She felt like she was a member of the team who made that decision for her child. Parent H said, "And the other thing that we agreed, all of us, that he needed to do the SAIL program during the summer. So he did SAIL during the summer, which helped him a lot. He progressed well in that program as well".

Interestingly, both parents expressed similar thoughts about their involvement in the retention decision. Parents felt that the retention decision was not theirs and that it was made by school staff instead. However, looking back on the decision, they indicated that they were satisfied with the decision that was made for their child and they would not have changed it. Parent I described how she struggled with the school-based team's decision:

And then we all held him back. We made a decision to hold him back...Well, they made the decision to hold him back, and I pondered on it if I should send him somewhere else to keep him with his grade level; however, I didn't want him to go to a higher grade and struggle and then be resentful and mean and angry because he's not able to keep up.

Parent H described how the decision that school staff made was not what she and her husband wanted for their child. She said:

I have strong feelings that he needed to be retained in kindergarten, and so and that didn't really pan out, so he did go ahead and go to first grade...Because like at the end of kindergarten what I thought this told me was that he needed to be retained in kindergarten. Obviously there were different ideas about that that were outside of our control, but to me, if you're below grade level and you continue to be below grade level, the question has to be raised: "Do you need to be in that grade again to get up to that grade level?" And so for me, in kindergarten, what I thought it meant was that he needed to be retained in kindergarten. There were different ideas.

Parent H also struggled with accepting the school's decision about retention because she did not understand the criteria for retention and how her child did or did not meet those criteria. The information that could have helped both parents better understand the decision-making process for retention was not available to them, and they felt that their voices were not heard when making a decision about their child's education. Conversely, the parents also felt responsible for their child's success in school and being their advocate, so it appeared that they felt a sense of helplessness during the decision-making process about retention.

Despite parents' dissatisfaction with their low involvement in the retention decision, they expressed that they would not have changed the school's decision. In hindsight, they felt that the school in fact made the best decision for their child, and they were satisfied with the results of the school's decision to retain their child. This high level of satisfaction despite a described low level of involvement in decision-making is similar to

the results of Fish (2008) and Goldstein and colleagues' (1980) studies. Parent I suggested that she had come to terms with the retention decision and decided to keep her child at the same school, saying, "So then I said maybe this is what he needs". Parent H also accepted the school's decision and expressed satisfaction with it by suggesting, "If I could go back, I don't think that I would change anything". She further explained:

It ended up not being that way and he did go into first grade and one of the things I told them at the end of the year meeting: I think their insistence upon him being in first grade as opposed to kindergarten, the administrative insistence of him being in first grade as opposed to kindergarten, ended up being a very good decision for him. I think it was the best decision for him. And that's based on the test scores for the first grade. Based on looking at how well, where he started first grade and where he ended first grade, I think first grade was the best decision for him. I think they made a very good decision in being insistent upon him going to first grade. And I told them that. I said you know I was wrong about that. I think first grade was better for him because he did advance...If you were asking me this last summer, I would have probably said something different, but in hindsight, it was a good decision to keep him in first grade. He has done well and because we had expressed our opinion about that, I think that the resources that were available to him and how they helped him in first grade, I mean there is nothing that I could have changed. I mean it was, he had help with his reading and he had the counseling and all of the other resources available to him. So I can't say that I could have changed, at this point looking back, I can't say that I would have changed anything or done anything differently.

Parent H was satisfied with the decision because she felt that her voice and concerns had been heard. She also felt that her child had made good progress during his retention year, which further confirmed her satisfaction with the retention decision. Despite not feeling involved in the retention decision, parents still expressed satisfaction with the decision because they felt that it was in the best interest of their child.

Based on these results, it appears that parents are still taking on the more passive role of asking questions and providing information. However, they are beginning to take

on a more active role in their child's education by supporting learning at home. They also work collaboratively with their child's teacher to streamline school-home interventions. Parents concluded that they want to work with their child's teacher and other school staff as a team. They want to feel included and play an active role in decision-making, just as the school-based professionals do. This includes being heard, having their opinions recognized and taken into account, and feeling valued during the process. Parent E described this desire by saying, "I try to partner up with the teacher". Parents wanted to feel like a necessary piece of the educational decision-making puzzle, as Parent H expressed:

We play a pivotal role in it as do the teachers and the administrators and L and the psychologists. Everybody together has really been involved with his education. I see us as really just a piece of the puzzle in his education. And kind of all of those things working together and we've been able to work successfully with everybody else. I don't see us as the main resource, I see us just as a resource.

And, parents wanted to feel like a necessary team member from the very beginning of their child's struggles. Parent I, who did not feel like a valued team member at the beginning of the study, concluded that she needed to feel that way during the next school year. She said:

You know, for someone to say in the beginning, to sit down and say we've looked at C's scores and his academic things since he's been here. This is where he is, this is where we would like for him to be or this is a great spot for him to be, what can we all do together to keep this this way?...We figure if me and you do this together, then we could keep him at this point. How does this sound to you?

Teachers in this study indicated that they wanted parents to be involved by attending meetings and helping their child at home. One teacher in particular, Teacher 2, suggested that teamwork with parents was essential for student success. She discussed this idea by saying:

Well I want the parents to see, to consider our group a team. I want them to feel like they are part of the team and so they have an active role to play as well...Statistics really do show that children who leave first grade below grade level have a slim chance of being on grade level in fifth grade. And I feel like when I first heard that, I was startled by that statistic. So I feel like parents need to know how important this is. And so that's why I need for them to be a part of the team.

Teacher 2 often talked about the notion of teamwork, but did not describe in depth what she thought that parents' roles on the team should be. All teachers, however, did discuss extensively the strategies that parents requested to support learning at home and their responses to them. Teacher 2 and Teacher 1 provided more standard and universal ideas to all parents, while Teacher 3 emphasized differentiating strategies depending on the individual parent and the student's needs. In discussing this, Teacher 2 said:

One of the major things I emphasize too when we have a conferences is that I let the parents know that the children can be working at three different levels: independent level, instructional level, and frustration level. And I let the parents know that noone should be trying to force a child to work at frustration level and that I like to be the person who is helping the children at their instructional level and that I want the parents to be helping the children at their independent level. And I let them know that practice at a child's independent level definitely builds their overall progress even though it might seem like at times that maybe it's a little bit too easy. I tell the parents that I would much rather the child joyfully want to sit down and work with their parents than begrudgingly want to sit down because it's too difficult. So I try to make sure that I explain the difference between those three levels and again let the parents know what I'm expecting from them. What their role is and that's to work at independent level.

Teacher 2 often recommended that parent read with their child at one level—their independent level. In contrast, Teacher 3 prided herself on providing individualized suggestions to parents about how to help their child. She said:

I actually sometimes show them different things or give them examples of different tasks, especially if they're asking about something in particular. And otherwise sometimes if it's a task that they're struggling with, I give

them an example and show them an example of how their child has responded or say this is the steps, strategies they're using.

Teacher 3 made an effort to provide different strategies to parents based on their child's individual needs. All teachers responded to parents' questions and concerns regarding how to help their child at home, which they felt was a more active way to be involved in decision-making. However, the ways in which teachers approached answering those questions varied.

All in all, parents felt like they played an important and active role in decision-making for their child by asking questions, seeking out information and resources, and helping their child at home. However, often times, they felt left out of important school-based decisions. This was especially true in terms of retention decisions. Parents wanted their voices to be heard and their concerns listened to during the decision-making process, and they wanted to be involved from the very beginning.

Interacting with Existing Components of the School System

At the exosystemic level, there were a variety of factors unique to this particular school system that likely impacted the ways in which parents developed an understanding of data and participated in educational decision-making. Such factors included the historically high level of parental involvement, the school-wide emphasis on data to make decisions, the value that teachers and other school staff place on professional collaboration, and the description of RtI that was provided to school staff and parents.

High Level of Parental Involvement

At DRS, there are several factors that impact parental involvement. First, teachers and support staff spoke to an "open door policy", which welcomes parents and other

family members to experience different aspects of the school day or participate as volunteers. Teachers also have parents as regular volunteers in the classroom and as assistants during special events. Although school staff recognized barriers to parental involvement at the school level, they expressed a high level of satisfaction with parental involvement and suggested that they welcomed parental involvement in multiple ways.

Support staff indicated that they emphasize an open door policy at DRS. That is, they want open communication with families and they want to encourage them to be present at the school as much as possible. Support staff X said, “Well we always have an open door policy. Parents can be involved as much as they like”. Teacher 3 agreed, suggesting, “I have a really open door policy where parents feel free to drop in”. Support staff X went on to describe how staff at DRS encourages parents by sharing information with them directly. She said:

We have very frequently in first grade a significant amount of parents who like to volunteer, be involved you know in the goings on in the classroom, which is great. Parents are welcome to call and ask questions at any time. They are always invited to a first conference in October. Nothing goes home, meaning like no academic progress reports or anything, go home until a conference has been had with them. We do our very best to get every single parent in to do that.

Support staff Z agreed with this by saying, “We have a very open communication system here”. All parents at this school are urged to meet with school staff and ask questions. Then, if any questions remained, they were encouraged to visit the school for a better understanding. Support staff Y said, “I always encourage parents to come in and see it too. If they don’t understand what SRA decoding is, come in and see it”. There is a noticeable system-wide agreement about the importance of an open door policy in addition to a welcoming environment to aid in parental involvement.

Teachers and support staff indicated that parents are regular classroom volunteers as well as participants in less frequent, special events. When participating regularly as volunteers in the classroom, parents typically helped to facilitate a small reading or math group. Teacher 2 said:

I have some parent volunteers that come in and they'll read one on one with children during our reader's workshop time. And what they're doing mainly is rereading familiar books. And it's to help the kids with fluency. And then also to help them with vocabulary because they talk to them some about the books and that kind of thing too... Then I have 2 parents that come in some during math time and they'll run a little math station. Usually it's a game that I have the parent do.

For some teachers, it was important for parents to feel comfortable when volunteering in the classroom. Teacher 3 attempted to make parents comfortable by allowing parents to choose from a variety of activities to participate in. She said:

I try to also differentiate with them as well and give them what activities within their comfort range and their strengths. Some parents are fine working with small group activities, some really do well one on one, some really prefer prep work kinds of activities. I would rather have families if they're in the classroom, work with the children. And so some parents who like more of the prep work kinds of things, I'll actually package and send home and have them do it at home so that it can maximize classroom time as really being instructional support.

Parents also were involved as chaperones and assistants for other events. Teacher 3 said that parents at this school who work often look in advance for other, less frequent ways to volunteer. She said:

I do have a lot of working moms this year. It's actually, different groups of, depending really on the employment, a lot of them that are available really make a point of committing a certain amount of time. And working parents, especially this year, they want to know ahead for anything they could participate in terms of classroom events or field trips. You know I have people asking me months ahead, when is so and so? Because they want to be able to plan ahead for it.

Parents who were unable to commit to a regular volunteering schedule wanted to be accessible when possible. For things like field trips or classwide activities, parents tried to be there, as Teacher 1 indicated: “I of course invite them to be chaperones for field trips...In first grade, we do an economics unit, Mexican restaurant. So I ask parents to come in and help when we were preparing for that”. Support staff X added to this by saying, “Parent volunteers, they come and have lunch with their kids, some parents on a regular basis. A lot of participation with field trips. Classroom activities. We have a lot of different types of celebrations, there’s always something going on that the families can come and be involved with. It’s an open door basically”. Overall, it seemed that a number of parents at this school participated as classroom volunteers on a regular basis, and for those who were unable to participate as frequently, they were willing to help with special events.

Some barriers to parent involvement at this school included crowding in the classroom, not feeling needed, and parents’ work schedules. Because of the training-oriented nature of this school, teachers often had interns, pre-interns, and observers in their classrooms. This often led to a high number of adults in the classroom, and teachers felt that it would be overwhelming to have parents in the classroom as well.

Teacher 1 discussed this issue:

Last year I had them [parents] be reading volunteers all throughout the year but this year I got pre interns, and so I kind of kicked the parents out because it was just too many adults. Because in first grade we get an assistant for reading and math. So it was myself, an assistant, and then two pre-interns, and then if I had a parent volunteer, it’s almost too many people. But so I had them for reading volunteers.

Another reason that led to decreased parent involvement was waning eagerness once they did not feel needed in the classroom. Teacher 3 explained:

A lot of parents are really eager, they're super in eager in kindergarten to get into the room. They're still fairly eager in first grade but what a lot of them what to do is come and scope things out and get a feel for things. And a lot of parents that I saw even as regular volunteers in kindergarten, once they come in the room, and I really focus a lot on kids being independent and responsible and self directed, so they almost feel like there's not a need for them. And I feel like there are two things. It is because the kids are so good at working on their own and then they essentially feel like there is not, having another adult isn't a necessity. And it's not a necessity but it certainly adds another dimension to the instructional content. But I often find parents come summer one way or another kind of fizzle out...So a lot of eager participation here. But I do find it interesting how they tend to show up like, oh okay, you're fine.

Despite these barriers, however, support staff were satisfied with the level of parent involvement at this school. Support staff Z suggested, "This is probably the best situation I've ever been in as far as working with parents. I don't have to track anybody down. They want to have their kids succeed". Teachers and support staff agreed that parents at this school appeared to be more involved than is typical. From asking questions to volunteering in the classroom to planning ahead so that they could participate in special events, parents at this school appeared to active and involved.

Use of Data to Guide Decision-Making

Another element of this school system that impacted parents' experiences was the school-wide emphasis on data to drive decision-making. This occurred at the individual teacher level as well as the systems level. Besides communicating with parents through their child's data, teachers and school staff also used data to guide their core instruction and their intervention groups. Similar to teachers, school staff also believed that the use of data streamlined communication with parents, but that inconsistent use of data sometimes caused a communication breakdown.

As discussed extensively in previous sections, teachers indicated that they used data, especially data from the CBM sheet, as a framework for describing individual

student progress. Support staff agreed that teachers and other staff use data in similar ways to inform parents of their child's progress. Support staff emphasized student progress when explaining data as well as understanding the "whole picture" of the child's achievement, which was very similar to teachers' views about communicating through data. Related to emphasizing student progress and gaining a complete understanding when communicating with data, Support staff Z said:

The progress of the kids, especially...I mean, the parents know that there's, I mean, they know when their child is struggling. They may not know exactly what it is that they're struggling with or what aspect of the subject area is causing trouble, but they know that they're having problems. So the parents are already aware there is a concern, so when the teachers are able to speak to those concerns specifically about data and show them, this is exactly what's going on, then that's the most important.

When discussing delivering a comprehensive, "whole picture" view of their child's functioning to parents, Support staff X said:

I think helping the parents see that not one of those tests or assessment pieces tell us everything we need to know. I think it's really important for them to see the whole picture and the way in which we've designed the assessment system as a whole. That helps us really understand what's happening with their children, especially in reading. That's obviously where we, we're good at this. Not so good at it in math. But being able to talk about how one particular part of this battery of assessments being below the expectation doesn't always necessarily indicate that there's an issue, could indicate that it's an issue when combined with the other pieces. It's helping them really understand that it's a whole rather than "My kid is low on one and what do I do to make that better?". It's really understanding them as a reader.

Overall, there is a system-wide support for using data to communicate student progress to parents.

One reason for this school-wide emphasis on communicating through data was the belief that data streamlines parent communication. Teachers also agreed with this, frequently suggesting that the data serves as their framework for discussions about the

student. Support staff X spoke about the objectivity of data and how using data assists teachers in providing solid, trustworthy information about student progress. Support staff

X said:

I think that teachers really feel like the data helps them make their case. You know, I remember being a new teacher and talking to parents about kids that weren't doing well, but I didn't really know how to prove that they weren't doing well because we didn't have any such thing. You know, it would be, this is what I see, they would see "at home he does, blah blah blah", and I didn't have anything to go back on. Now there's a lot of concrete proof and I think that that's really comforting to teachers in being able to communicate kids' progress.

By speaking through data, teachers are able to rely on objectivity rather than professional guesswork to make decisions. This also provides them with better support when talking to parents about progress, since they do have emotional ties to the data and sometimes react negatively.

Two of the primary ways, other than parent communication, that teachers and other school staff used data were to inform their core instruction and to guide decision-making about individual students, particularly their need for additional intervention. In discussing how she used student data to inform her core instruction, Teacher 2 said:

And it helped me strengthen my core. So it helped me understand what all children needed and of course that also there's impact on the individual when you're thinking about your core. But it just helped me be a more reflective teacher and think about what all kids need and then I could figure out also then what my Tier 2s needed. It's informative.

For Teacher 2, examining student data helped her to analyze the needs of her students. This was true for her whole-class instruction as well as her instruction to her smaller, intervention groups. She also felt that the data assisted her in making more reliable decisions rather than those based on guesswork. Teacher 2 added:

And then what I really loved is that I just, I really liked feeling more informed about my decision-making. And so it was less gut-level and it's just more

informed. And I did come to find that I did think that it was very predictable...That it really did play out in a way that I thought was... accurate.

For Teacher 3, collecting data helped her to keep tabs on struggling students and objectively determine student progress. She indicated:

I feel like more of my kids are at a higher level at the end of the year because I can really keep regular tabs on them...And since we've been doing that, really the majority of my kids, a very high percentage by the end of the year are making on their targets. On the last assessment, I had one child that didn't meet several of his targets, but he's also a child who was almost retained in kindergarten, and all my other intervention kids, a couple of them had missed one target, one missed two, and all the rest met all the targets.

By collecting regular data to guide decision-making for her students, Teacher 3 felt very aware of her students' progress, which she also felt led to increased student progress overall.

In addition to informing core instruction, teachers indicated that they formulated their intervention groups based on data as well, particularly when examining data during the grade-level Student Success Team (SST) meetings. Teacher 3 said in regards to her intervention groups, "we figure out [those small groups] on based on the scores". She expressed that using data to guide the formulation of these groups helped her to assist students who she would not have typically identified as needing extra support.

For her, that identification was often due to a fluency issue. Teacher 3 said:

So that's been one of the most helpful things to me is having those timed tests because it really helps you discover kids sooner who aren't processing as quickly as other kids so there's so much going on in the classroom. And it's not the main outliers, it's not the kids who are obviously really slow, it's the ones that seem sharp that have a lot of information that are just a little bit slow who are not meeting benchmarks who earlier in teaching kindergarten would not have seemed to be red flagged. So you pick up, I feel like the DIBELS especially, helped us pick up kids to work with sooner, more intensively than we were able to do prior to the DIBELS testing, which I would not have thought would have done that.

Data helped Teacher 3 to guide the group membership, especially for those students who were performing below grade-level or at the cusp, but who were not significantly below grade-level. The data helped her to identify those students early and provide them with additional support.

However, using data to guide communication and decision-making was found to be tricky, especially when data were used inconsistently. This often led to a communication breakdown or allowed parents to receive mixed messages about their child from different members of school staff. Support staff X indicated that this occurs because teachers sometimes disregard data when they are inconsistent with their observations, or because different teachers explain the data in different ways. In terms of using other information in lieu of data, Support staff X said:

I have seen instances where teachers will use data to explain away a problem. I've seen instances where teachers will disregard the data to parents and say they must have just been having a really bad day this day. Not that that couldn't be the case, but...that "we don't really look at the testing very much, we really rely on what we see everyday...This is just one piece"... For the teacher, when the data contradicts their expectations, sometimes there can be a communication breakdown, I guess I should say.

Teachers reported using data in combination with their own observations, each as a "layer" for understanding and explaining student progress. However, when the data contradict their own personal beliefs or expectations, it appears that it causes a significant miscommunication between themselves and the parent. In other cases, there are individual differences in the ways that teachers explain data to parents, which often leads parents with mixed messages form year to year. Support staff X said, "So I've seen it where parents get a mixed message depending on who they sit with, and kind of all of the teachers' expectations about it".

Parents also reported sometimes receiving mixed messages from the school about their child's progress, particularly in regards to the issues that Support staff X pointed out. For some parents, they were confused when their child's data did not match up with the teacher's explanation of his or her progress. Parent I explained her frustration with this situation:

Because it seems that when I'm talking to you one on one about him, he's doing great, you're seeing good things. I don't need to worry about anything. He's doing great. But when you send these home, I don't see great... Yeah because just during the year, it would be like when you would ask, oh he'll be fine, he's doing fine, he'll be good. By the time we get here, he'll be right where he need to be. And I'm like, oh God, here we go with this again. Just tell me. He's not fine! I don't want to wait until the end of the year to get there. I want to be above where he needs to be.

Parent I saw a clear disconnect between the teacher's explanation of her child's progress, based on her own observations and experiences, and the actual data. This led to frustration on the part of the parents because she was not able to fully understand how her child was performing in the classroom. In another instance, Parent F was shocked to hear about her child's struggles because of the differences in the way that her child's kindergarten and first grade teachers explained the data. She discussed:

Which, you may or may not be interested to know, is a concern because we had in kindergarten, Ms. C, and I had one parent teacher conference with her midyear and she did some more testing with P, same format. And everything she said was, "P is doing great, she's ready to start reading early. There's three kids that are ready to start reading early, I'm going to go ahead and push her with that group and she kind of went over the numbers. As you can see, P is right where she needs to be." But then when I learned at the information session that those numbers actually meant even though they wanted her at a 12 and she was at a 12, that meant she was minimally achieving. So I had in my head in kindergarten, "Wow P is going to be advanced!" And then I learn in first grade, it means she's barely slipping by.

Again, the lack of continuity in describing data led to a negative emotional reaction by this parent because she was given a description of the data by two different people in two totally different ways.

Value of Professional Teamwork

The teachers and other school staff at DRS also prided themselves on the value they placed on collaboration among each other. In particular, this was described in terms of participating during individual student meetings and assisting each other in uncomfortable situations. Again, professional teamwork is a major aspect of DRS's school-wide culture that impacts the ways in which parents experience data and decision-making.

When parents interacted with school staff, particularly during meetings regarding their individual child, a number of school-based professionals attended. That is, parents were usually interacting with a team of school staff to discuss their child's needs and progress. Two primary examples of this occurred during parent-teacher conferences and Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings. Support staff Z discussed how she was often involved during parent-teacher conferences:

Parent conferences. After every CBM went home, the teachers schedule a conference with every child's parent in the classroom. So with those parents that the student is in Tier 3, there are some definite concerns either because of being new to the system or because of the pace of the growth of the student, I'll sit in on the meetings and basically speak to what I'm doing in here. And how it matches up with Tier 2 and Tier 1.

Because she was another teacher who instructed the child and collected data about the child, she was involved in conferences to further discuss the child's services, help parents make sense of the data, and answer any questions. Because she worked

closely with a number of students, Support staff Z also participated in IEP meetings, as she described here:

IEPs...If the student is, we're talking about first graders. So those students are typically Other Health Impaired or language, so I'm there as just a participant to talk about what's going on with Tier 3 because the OT and the language specialist are doing the goals. With this particular student, however, we did do academic goals along with the language goals because his needs were so...that's what we needed for him. So I wrote the goals and described those to the parents.

Support staff Z's participation during IEP meetings also consisted of sharing data, describing interventions, and discussing their child's goal. Overall, in formal meeting situations, a team of several staff members, rather than one individual, frequently interacted with parents during decision-making.

Another element of professional teamwork stemmed from helping each other in difficult situations when interacting with parents. This was often the case when teachers asked for assistance in explaining poor student progress or discussing other serious issues such as behavior difficulties or possible retention. Having another school staff member there helped teachers feel less nervous and also protected the important parent-teacher relationship.

Sometimes, support staff assisted teachers in explaining data to parents. The goal of the support staff member was to help the parent gain a clear and comprehensive understanding about their child's achievement. So, when the teacher was experiencing difficulty with this, the support staff either helped to train the teacher or assisted the teacher in-person at the meeting with the parent. Support staff X said:

Most of the time, the teacher will request it or it's a decision at the SST table for the most part. Or I've seen a red flag in the data and say hey, let's call these parents in. Let's sit down together and make sure we're all on the same page. But most of the time, they're asking me, "Can you please come and help the parents understand?"...I have also consulted from the back.

So giving teachers the words they need to be able to talk to parents about it.

The first solution to this issue was to consult with the teacher and give them ideas about ways to explain the data. Support staff Y agreed that collaborating the with teacher was the first step, adding: “Most of the time, going to the teacher first and saying, listen this is what we gotta do and we gotta make sure that we have this conference with them. Because a lot of the time teachers are feeling attacked. And so there has to be some talking down before we get into that meeting”.

If personal collaboration and consultation was not successful or if the situation was a very difficult one, then the support staff often jumped in to help out the teachers at the meetings. Support staff X indicated:

I find that when data is not up to par, the teachers rely on me to come in and do the explaining for them. Sometimes they like that because they feel like it comes from a different authority, you know, with the parent. Sometimes they just feel nervous, especially new teachers feel very nervous about being able to explain it.

When interacting with parents directly, some teachers felt uncomfortable explaining the data, especially when a student was not making progress. In those cases, the support staff members willingly assisted teachers in those situations to help the parents understand their child’s academic progress in a clear and comprehensible way.

In other situations, teachers felt uncomfortable because of the topic of conversation, such as poor behavior or retention. Support staff were also asked to assist with these meetings so that teachers were able to maintain their positive relationships with the parents. For severe behavioral difficulties, Support staff Y was the person who interacted with parents, rather than the child’s teacher. She said, “I get involved...usually the child will misbehave and then I have to be called into the room or

wherever they're at and then I go get them and then we talk about consequences or whatever needs to happen. And I always call parents when I see a kid". The same was true for severe academic cases, such as in possible retention situations. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, teachers did not want to be the one to explain the situation.

But the really difficult ones. You know, the really hard ones. The retention conference kinds of things, the explanation of data. I've been involved in a few of those... Teachers really find that conversation very uncomfortable. They don't really want to engage in that conversation at all. They want somebody else to come and say it, especially when, again, the child is doing quite well and the parents feel like they want him retained or her retained when the data indicates there's no need for it. That's where we tend to get into our most stickiest situations around decision-making roles. Rarely the other way. There will be some parents who don't want their child retained, and even though they know they're having problems, but often it's the parents requesting retention when there is not a data-indicated need.

When the topic is a difficult one to address with parents, the support staff assisted teachers and took on the primary role of explaining that. Support staff X said that her reason for doing that is to protect the parent-teacher relationship. She said, "You know, there have been tense conferences. I hate being the bad guy, but sometimes that's my role to protect the relationship of the teacher is for me to go ahead and take the heat and let the teacher maintain the relationship that needs to be there for the sake of the child... If it goes awry, it can be on me. It doesn't need to be on them". Support staff X understood the significance of maintaining a positive relationship between the parent and teacher and understood that a conversation topic such as retention could have a negative impact on that relationship. So, she was comfortable coming in as an outside voice to discuss that possibility.

Description of RtI Provided to Parents and Staff

A final element of the school system that affects parent's experiences with data and decision-making is the information about RtI given to staff as well as parents. For

parents in this study, it seemed that there was a disconnect between what school staff and parents understood about RtI. That is, although parents expressed a general understanding about the intervention support that was provided to their student, they did not know any of the language associated with RtI and sometimes were not informed when their child was moving through tiered instruction.

Support staff indicated that teachers followed a typical protocol during their conferences, which included a discussion about the student's data in comparison to the grade-level standards as well as the support provided to them in the classroom. Support staff Z said:

We have regular conferences that occur after CBM windows, so they're sitting with the parents and going through their progress report cards, showing them exactly how they're doing according to our progress monitoring. They're also talking to them about the grade level standards and how their kid is working toward those grade level standards, where they're excelling and where they're having trouble.

Support staff Y was also perceptive about the common format for conferences, agreeing that teachers delivered a general overview of the child's achievement and intervention support:

What I think they're communicating about their data. I think they are communicating where the child is in comparison to other kids...And I think they're also communicating what they have done and either if it's worked or not worked...And I think they are also communicating how the kid is responding to what they have done...I think that it depends on the teacher, again. But I think they are very good at describing what they have done, how the kid is responding, and what the school is going to do now to try to help the kid.

Support staff Z also indicated, however, that parents are also informed by the teacher about their child's receiving of tiered instruction and a description about the RtI process. She noted:

They're also talking to them initially about Tier 2 because it happens in the classroom and what kind of services are provided that way. And that's where the first discussions start with Tier 3. The kids are usually...if they're in Tier 3 at the end of the school year, they typically start the beginning of the year in Tier 3 so the parents are already familiar with the process. If the child's been retained, they start the year in Tier 3, so again the parents are already familiar with the process. For those students who come in that are going to fall into the Tier 3 category by October, the teachers are having that discussion on how the Rtl process works, what's going on, and what they should expect if their kids are not doing well...They describe the Rtl process about how we have the core instruction and that they work with them in small groups if they're still having trouble in math or reading, so we call that Tier 2. And then additional support is available for Tier 3. We try to put it in very easy, laymans terms.

For parents in this study, however, this was not the case. While some parents understood that their child was not meeting grade-level expectations and was getting extra support for that, they did not mention tiered intervention or the Rtl process. Parent

A gave a typical response when asked about her child's intervention:

Teacher 1 is giving him...she moved him into her specific reading group. He's not being pulled out of the class for anything. At this point he's doing his reading in the classroom and with stuff that's coming home, but I think it's the same stuff that's going home for everybody. So I don't think really anything different is happening for him except being put into her individual reading group when they are doing their practicing with an adult.

Parent F also said:

Well for reading, Teacher 1 splits the room into different reading levels. I think I'm kind of picturing that she has three different reading levels and P is probably with the group that needs a little extra help and I think Teacher 1 has assigned herself to that group most days. And then parents and/or the interns or, I think Mr. D is a reading teacher, takes the middle and the high level readers. So just Teacher 1 herself working with P and the one or two other students in that grouping. It's what I think happens.

While these parents had a general understanding that their child was receiving some sort of extra support, they did not know specific details and did not mention the Rtl process or tiered intervention.

For other parents, they were not appropriately informed about the intervention services that their child was receiving. Parent E, for example, did not understand the language on the CBM sheet that indicated that her child was receiving additional support. She said:

I don't really know of...Okay, so this was, I brought this (Kindergarten CBM sheet). This was after her kindergarten, they put this here (says "Tier 2 KPals") and nobody explained to me what this was. And it wasn't until this year when I was talking to the guidance counselor, and she said, "Well is she Tier 1, is she Tier 2?" And I said, "Oh I remember seeing Tier 2." And she said "Oh, well that means she must be getting in classroom help." I'm like okay...And so we're having this conversation and so she says, "Well, you know. Okay so X is not taking her out?" And I say, "No she falls in a gray area, you know." "Is she Tier 1/Tier 2?" And I'm like, "Ohhh I saw that!" And that's when she said, "Oh yeah, that means in-classroom help." And that's how... It wasn't even in school that I find out! Yeah! It would've been nice to have an explanation of what this was. I didn't know, and it would have been nice to know in the first quarter because she would have had, I would think, this in her file...Yeah, nobody told me. I had no idea. And I still do this day don't know what K Pals means. What does that mean? What does that mean? And was that instruction for the first grade teacher? I don't know.

While Parent E knew that her child was participating in a small group, she did not understand the language that was being used to communicate this or what the Rtl process even meant for her child. In other cases, parents did not understand the interventions that their child was participating in. For Parent I, she thought that her child's interventions included receiving modified work in the classroom. In reality, he had been receiving Tier 3 instruction all year and was being pulled out of class. She explained:

Mmhmm, in a different format, mmhmm. I think she's good about that because it's not noticeable to the other kids. It's not like, okay C here, I'm going to sit you to the side because you're going to do something different, you know? She just hands out the paperwork and when she gets to him she hands his and keep going. So I really like that because he had an issue when he was in kindergarten when they would pull him to the back of the class and do the speech stuff. He's like, "Everybody knows something's

wrong with me. I get pulled to the back of the class. I can't do what the other people are doing." So that was also another major issue for him. So now she doesn't do it like how it was done, so I like that.

During the member checks with participants almost a year after the initial interviews, each parent indicated that they did not know what Rtl was or what it meant for their child. A disconnect exists between what support staff believe is happening in terms of communication with parents about Rtl and what is actually happening. It seems that, in an attempt to communicate with parents in a clear and comprehensible fashion, teachers leave out information that they think will be too difficult for parents to understand. In this case, much of that information centered around the Rtl process, specifically language related to Rtl, as well as a general description of Rtl and what impact Rtl has on individual students.

CHAPTER 4 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Summary

Research has indicated that the benefits of parental involvement include increased levels of student academic motivation and achievement, the establishment of a trusting relationship between the school and home, and a higher level of parent-reported satisfaction with the educational decision-making process (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Norris, 1999; Stancin, Reuter, Dunn, & Bickett, 1984; Steere, Pancsofar, Wood, & Hecimovic, 1990; Watkins, 1997). However, schools still struggle with facilitating parent participation in meaningful ways (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). Two roles that parents often take on are communicating with their child's school and being involved in decision-making (Epstein, 2005). Various research studies have examined parents' understanding about academic progress information they receive from their child's school (Brantlinger, 1987; Harniss, Epstein, Bursuck, Nelson, & Jayanthi, 2001; Harry, 1992; Waltman & Frisbie, 1994) and parent participation during educational decision-making (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Harry, 1992; McNamara, Telzrow, & DeLamatre, 1999; Vaughn, 1988). However, few studies to date have examined such roles of parental involvement within a Response to Intervention (Rtl) process.

Rtl is a multi-tiered service delivery method that is currently being implemented in public schools. The primary goal for an Rtl approach is to improve instruction for all students, and secondarily, to replace the traditional "refer-test-place" model of disability identification in the school system (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Implementation of Rtl processes will ideally address limitations of current practices, including enhancing parental involvement within the school system (Reschly et al., 2007). In fact,

researchers assert that “parents are necessary, not optional, in a well-conceived application of RtI” (Reschly et al., 2007, p. 153). Such key places for parental involvement that align with RtI processes include improved home-school communication through the use of ongoing curriculum-based measurement, the opportunity to be actively involved in prevention/early intervention activities, and participation in the collaborative problem-solving process (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Gresham, 2007; Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; Reschly et al., 2007). Given the recency of schools implementing RtI processes, few studies have investigated parents’ understanding of academic progress information and participation in decision-making in a school using this service delivery framework. Thus, this study focused on how parents develop an understanding of academic progress information and how they participate in educational decision-making during one school’s RtI process.

Data analysis produced four major themes regarding the ways in which parents develop an understanding of their children’s academic progress information: 1) diverse and numerous opportunities to make sense of their child’s progress; 2) reliance on joint examination of the data; 3) establishing a close, trusting relationship with their child’s teacher; and 4) realizing the “whole picture” of their child. In summary, at DRS, parents were afforded a variety of opportunities to interact with teachers and other school staff. This included formal interactions, such as during parent-teacher conferences and through use of a CBM data sheet, as well as informal interactions, such as phone calls, emails, and seeing each other before and after school. Through these interactions, parents were able to gain a well-rounded understanding about how their child was progressing in school and what they could do to help at home. These interactions also

allowed them to ask questions, express concerns, and understand what was happening in the classroom. It was revealed that a majority of conversations centered on the assessment-intervention link. This occurred for several reasons, including that teachers informed parents what they were doing to help their struggling child in the classroom and because all parents expressed a desire to help their child at home.

It was also discovered that parents relied on examining their child's data with someone who is familiar with academic progress data for a number of reasons. For parents in this study, this occurred most frequently during direct contact with the teacher and secondarily with other sources of social support. Having face-to-face conversations about the data allowed parents to better make sense of unfamiliar educational terms, better understand their child's individualized needs, and establish open lines of communication with their child's teacher. In fact, parents seemed to rely on this contact to make sense of their child's data. Similarly, teachers desired to communicate in clear, parent-friendly ways. In addition, by interacting consistently and meaningfully with their child's teacher, parents described how they developed trust in the teacher's judgment about their description of their child's academic achievement. Within this parent-teacher relationship, some parents also described seeing their child's teacher as a source of emotional support for them while they developed an understanding of their child's academic progress. Furthermore, parents continued to view their child's teacher as a source of valuable information throughout their patterns of communication, particularly in terms of ways to support learning at home.

Finally, parents developed an understanding of their child's academic progress information by realizing the "whole picture" of their child's academic achievement. This

emerged from combining the academic data they had received from the school with their own observations and teacher observations. Although the CBM was an important source of information when developing an understanding of their child's academic progress, parents suggested that they used multiple sources of information to make sense of their child's progress. The most common sources of information were the data from the CBM sheet in combination with parent and teacher observations, as well as experience with data from their other children. Furthermore, when asked to describe their child's academic progress, parents talked about their child's struggles as well as their successes. However, when interpreting the academic progress information, parents focused on their child's positive qualities. Teachers also presented the data in similar ways, presenting a balanced view about the student's achievement while emphasizing their positive characteristics.

Despite parents' overall positive view of the ways that they developed an understanding of their child's academic progress information, parents still expressed a number of unmet needs. In particular, parents desired to be informed of their child's difficulties as early as possible, which some did not feel happened. Parents also wanted to gain a better understanding of CBM, including the skills measured and the classroom assessment schedule. Not surprisingly, parents also desired more information regarding how to support learning at home. Overall, parents wanted their concerns to be listened to, and when that occurred, most parents seemed satisfied with the information that they were given regarding their child's academic progress.

In terms of parent participation in decision-making for their children, three interactive and connected themes were revealed: 1) determining their level of

involvement based on the intensity of their child's needs; 2) experiences within the parent-teacher dyad; and 3) interacting with existing components of the school system.

At the individual level, parents' discussions indicated that they first assessed the intensity of their child's needs. In doing so, this gave them a better idea of how much they needed to be involved in educational decision-making for their child. Parents who felt that their child's needs were very intense sought the most opportunities to be involved in decision-making.

Parents' participation in educational decision-making was also influenced by experiences within the parent-teacher dyad. Specifically, parents identified information gathering and working collaboratively on their child's team as their primary roles in decision-making within the relationship with their child's teacher. In terms of information gathering, asking questions and hypothesizing about their child's struggles were two of the main responsibilities that parents discussed. In terms of working collaboratively on their child's team, parents saw themselves as just "one piece of the puzzle" on the school-based decision-making team. To fulfill their role on this team, parents felt obligated to help their child at home.

At the school level, there were a variety of factors unique to this particular school that likely impacted the ways in which parents developed an understanding of data and participated in educational decision-making. Such factors included the historically high level of parental involvement, the school-wide emphasis on data to make decisions, the value that teachers and other school staff place on professional collaboration, and the description of RtI that was provided to school staff and parents.

Discussion

Alignment with Suggested Parental Roles During RtI

In examining political/legal initiatives in light of RtI implementation, researchers have postulated that there are several points at that intersection that can lead to improved parental involvement practices. Such components include the involvement of parents from early on in their child's education to evaluation of educational decisions; the delivery of comprehensive information regarding the general education curriculum, the assessment process, and state standards; ongoing home-school communication regarding student academic progress; collaboration during educational decision-making; parent training; and professional development regarding parental involvement in schools (Epstein, 2005; Landsverk, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). This study examined aspects of three of these elements (delivery of comprehensive information, ongoing home-school communication, and collaboration). Previous research has addressed these elements, but few studies have specifically examined these elements in light of schools' current focus on RtI implementation.

In terms of the delivery of comprehensive information, within an RtI process, parents ideally should be able to receive information about the academic material their child is learning, as well as the ways in which their child's skills are being assessed (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Much of the assessment information is tied to the child's curriculum (i.e., curriculum-based measurement, or CBM). CBM can be used to inform parents regarding what their child is learning and how their learning is being measured. Providing them with CBM information also assists in joint monitoring (at school and home) of student academic progress and empowers parents with tools to

become involved in interventions (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). Furthermore, curriculum-based expectations can be explained in graphic format, therefore providing parents with a visual representation of expected standards in comparison to student achievement which will likely assist them in better understanding their child's academic progress (Deno, 2003).

Similarly, ongoing and frequent home-school communication is another element of parent involvement that is discussed at the intersection of political/legal initiatives and the RtI process. According to NCLB and IDEA, teachers are required to communicate frequently and in understandable formats with parents regarding their child's academic progress (Epstein, 2005). This communication needs to occur in written and face-to-face formats. In addition, according to IDEA, schools are required to provide parents with all information related to their child's education. Within an RtI process, this could include universal screening information, curriculum-based measurements, and progress monitoring data. According to NCLB, schools must provide this information on a regular and continuous basis, so assessment should be dynamic and ongoing (NCLB, 2002; Reschly et al., 2007). School staff also must be reasonably available to meet with parents to further clarify the information and to address parents' questions or concerns (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005).

Parents and teachers in this study suggested that CBM data were the most frequent sources of information collected on students. In fact, teachers indicated that the CBM reporting sheet was actually the framework for communicating with parents about their child's academic progress. Parents understood that CBM was the primary way that students were being assessed; however, they still desired additional

information regarding CBM. They saw that the information on the CBM sheet was valuable because it painted a picture of the child's progress in terms of the critical skill areas of reading and provided a well-rounded picture about their child's academic achievement. Parents also saw the information as a source of ideas for how to support learning at home. But, many parents did not know how to make sense of the data on their own. And, even though direct contact and conferences with their child's teacher increased their immediate understanding of the data, parents noted they often could not remember what many of the skills meant or how they were measured when later reviewing the CBM sheet at home. So, while parents believed that CBM provided valuable information about their child's progress, they continued to struggle with making sense of that information on their own. Harry (1992) argued that communicating with parents through written text assumes that parents understand the nature of their child's difficulties and the tools by which they are being assessed. Teachers in this study typically paired written communication with a face-to-face meeting or verbal explanation. Parents appreciated this, indicating that it would be impossible to understand the data based on the CBM sheet alone. Many parents had questions about the critical skill areas of reading as measured by the CBM sheet as well as what they could do with that information to help their child at home. Thus, it seems that CBM is a valuable tool for joint monitoring of student progress and can provide valuable information regarding ways to support learning at home, but schools must keep in mind that parents need direct and frequent contact with teachers and other school professionals to understand the data. Without that contact, parents feel lost, whether they are attempting to

understand report card data, technical information in psychoeducational reports, or curriculum-based measurement.

Furthermore, a major concern that parents expressed in previous studies was that they heard of their child's academic difficulties too late (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Jayanthi et al., 1992, as cited in Harniss et al., 2001). Some parents in this study expressed the same sentiment, despite the frequency with which CBM data was collected on a number of students. Ongoing assessment was occurring using CBM as recommended by educational initiatives, but many parents still felt less informed than desired about their child's progress. They reported not receiving information about their child's performance on progress monitoring assessments. In addition, parents were mostly satisfied with the availability of teachers and other school staff in providing information to them about their child's education. While they were satisfied with the ongoing communication, some parents spoke about the desire to be listened to in conversations about their child's educational needs and performance. They wanted to be a valuable contributor to their child's education and wanted their concerns to be heard and taken into account. When this occurred, parents were trusting of school staff and satisfied, despite their child's academic outcomes, which is similar to that of previous studies (Dowd-Eagle, 2007). When parents did not feel like a valued team member and did not believe that their voices were heard, they felt helpless or frustrated.

Finally, collaboration is an important element of parent involvement that is discussed in political/legal initiatives in light of RtI implementation. According to these initiatives, parents must be afforded the opportunity to be a part of all educational decisions made about their child (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008). To be involved, they

must first be informed, which is the topic of prior sections. According to NCLB and IDEA, it is the school's responsibility to provide parents with comprehensive information about their child's education as early as possible and to facilitate their involvement in educational decision-making (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). This is not specifically defined, but is based on the assumptions that parents have the opportunity to be collaborative, participating members at any meeting involving their child's education and that reasonable accommodations are made to enhance parental involvement (Cortiella, 2006; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). For Burns and Gibbons (2008), being a collaborative, participating member includes the ability to evaluate and make suggestions regarding their child's educational services, as well as having the ability to be a part of the collaborative problem-solving team in whatever capacity they prefer. This could range from receiving information, to participating in interventions, to evaluating intervention effectiveness (Burns & Gibbons, 2008).

Parents in this study expressed a desire for collaboration with school staff and to be "one piece of the puzzle" on their child's team. Most parents felt that they could not sufficiently participate in educational decision-making for their child without fully understanding their academic progress, which is consistent with past research (Barton et al., 1984). Understanding their child's progress and becoming involved in collaborative decision-making about their child are inextricably linked. For many parents in this study, involvement was defined partially as giving and seeking out information about their child, a markedly passive role as discovered in previous research (Barton, et al., 1984; Lusthaus et al., 1981). Parents identified asking questions or seeking additional

information as a major role that they play in their child's education. For parents in this study, they primarily asked questions about skills on the CBM sheet, their child's individual data, and how to support learning at home. One way that every parent in this study desired active involvement in their child's education, though, was through support for learning at home. Henderson and Berla (1994) discovered that home support for learning is becoming a more prevalent role that parents wish to take on in their child's education, and this was confirmed by parents in this study. Every parent reported that they were trying to help their child with academics at home and wanted additional information about how to assist their child. Interestingly, though, teachers' discussions suggested that they were aware of only a few parents who were actively engaged in supporting learning at home.

For parents who were involved in more formal decision-making procedures, such as related to grade retention, they often expressed that the decision was not theirs. It was presented as a school-based decision and one that parents did not perceive as having much say in the matter. However, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the decisions despite a low level of involvement in decision-making, which is similar to the results of Fish (2008) and Goldstein and colleagues' (1980) studies. For parents in this study, they felt that the decision was generally beneficial for their child in the long run, so they were able to reflect about their minimal participation in hindsight. This likely had an impact on their positive outlook about decision-making. In fact, parents suggested that they would have been much more negative and critical about their low level of involvement if they had been interviewed immediately after the decision was made. Despite this high level of satisfaction regardless of a low level of involvement in

some formal decisions, researchers suggest that parents should be valued collaborators regarding their child's education. In terms of active support for learning at home, by employing similar intervention strategies at school and home, the teacher and parent are promoting continuity across the child's learning environments and expressing shared goals and expectations (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008). And, collaboration can improve home-school communication and decision-making, as Mundschenk and Foley (1994) concluded that believing in collaboration allows for parents and teachers to trust and respect each other, which will likely reduce future miscommunication.

Professional Development for Teachers and School Staff

In improving the ways that schools interact with and involve parents, it is imperative to provide professional development opportunities regarding home-school interactions. As parents in this study indicated, they relied on teachers to provide them with valuable information and involve them in decision-making opportunities. That relationship with their child's teacher was the most important one for parents to establish and maintain for the sake of understanding their child's data and ways to be involved in their education. Similarly, Anderson and Minke (2007) emphasized the importance of the parent-teacher relationship, as specific invitations from teachers asking parents to be involved in decision-making had a strong effect on parents' actual involvement in decision-making. Overall, the parent-teacher relationship cannot be emphasized enough in understanding how parents experience data and decision-making at their child's school. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that teachers and other school staff understand how to involve parents in effective and meaningful ways.

A major contributor to parents' understanding of data was the way in which a teacher described their child's progress. It would be valuable to help all teachers learn

effective communication strategies to better improve the ways that they interact with parents on a day-to-day basis (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Such strategies include: begin all interactions with a positive message, convey to parents that their input is invaluable and that everyone wants to work as a team, listen while the parents are speaking and acknowledge their concerns, and “respect that the family members are experts” about their child (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, p.194). Parents in this study expressed repeatedly that they wanted their concerns to be heard, that they wanted to work together as a team as “one piece of the puzzle” for their child, and that they wanted to be actively involved by helping their child at home. On a similar note, parents presented balanced views about their child’s academic achievement but also emphasized their strengths. It would seem that utilizing the aforementioned communication strategies would increase the likelihood that parents are satisfied with the information they receive from their child’s school as well as the ways in which they are involved in decision-making.

Parents in this study also emphasized the notion of trust when building a relationship with their child’s teacher. By interacting consistently and meaningfully with their child’s teacher, parents described how they developed trust in the teacher’s judgment about their description of the child’s academic achievement. Within this parent-teacher relationship, some parents also described seeing their child’s teacher as a source of emotional support for them while they developed an understanding of their child’s academic progress. Furthermore, parents viewed their child’s teacher as a source of valuable information, particularly in terms of strategies for supporting learning at home. They trusted the teacher’s professional opinions once they were able to

establish consistent communication patterns and to have opportunities to understand the teacher's perspective. Adams and Christenson (2000) also described trust as an important factor in the parent-teacher relationship when considering parental involvement. In fact, they discovered that the quality of parent-teacher interactions was a better indicator of parental involvement than the frequency of interactions (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Again, the most effective communication strategies are those that allow parents to be heard and assure them that they are a valued member of their child's school-based team. Establishing open and continuous lines of communication with parents allows them to trust teachers and other school staff because they are recognized as informed, valuable members of their child's team.

Another important professional development activity to improve upon current home-school communication practices is to encourage school staff to examine their own perceptions about parental involvement. Previous research has suggested that professionals' perceptions of the roles of parents hindered parental involvement during educational decision-making. In these studies, school professionals indicated that parents should only gather and present information about the student during the decision-making process (Goldstein et al., 1980; Lusthaus et al., 1981) and that parents do not have the necessary expertise to participate in the process (Gilliam & Coleman, 1981). Therefore, professionals would prefer that parents wait passively as decisions are made about their child's education, rather than be involved in "developing and judging programs and finalizing decisions as active participants" (Gerber, Banbury, Miller, & Griffin, 1986, p. 158). Similarly, Anderson and Minke (2007) indicated that many school-based professionals judge parents' level of involvement based on their

visibility at school. However, most parental involvement activities occur at home and are invisible to school staff (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Teachers in this study indicated that they knew of only a few parents who were actively engaged in working with their children at home, despite the fact that each parent indicated throughout this study that they were participating in activities at home to support learning. This pre-judgment likely had an impact on the ways in which teachers interacted with parents that they considered “more” or “less” involved. Gaining an understanding of one’s own perceptions and the ways in which they impact professional practices hopefully will allow school staff to re-examine the ways in which they think about parents in the school setting.

Preparing Parents

In order to have a successful family-school partnership that encourages parental involvement in their child’s education, parents also must be prepared to take on that role. In many cases, this requires education and support to enhance parents’ knowledge and skills and to empower them to be engaged. However, it is important to note that “how we support families to enhance learning at home is different than home support for learning” (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, p. 184). That is, schools should play a cooperative role in supporting parents to be educators at home. One way to do this is to give parents strategies to be proactive educators at home before their child begins to experience failure (Bempechat, Graham, & Jimenez, 1999). Parents in this study expressed similar desires: they wanted to be informed of difficulties early on and wanted to know ways to help alleviate those difficulties, particularly through supporting learning at home. Parents stated that they simply wanted *information*. Armed with strategies that were specific to their child’s struggles, parents felt empowered to help their child and

make a difference in their education. Without such information, parents felt helpless and frustrated, as if it were too late to have an impact on their child's learning.

One option that parents in this study were offered was a school-wide information session about CBM. According to the parents who attended the session, a relatively small number of parents were in attendance. Even those who attended did not seem to understand the goal behind the information session, but they did learn more about the types of assessments that their children were taking. Information sessions and workshops can be one way of providing valuable knowledge and materials to parents. Christenson & Sheridan (2001) suggested that schools offer a variety of parent training opportunities with a variety of ways to disperse information. This includes regularly scheduled training sessions, informational meetings, and parent-to-parent support groups. Christenson & Sheridan (2001) recommended both formal and informal opportunities for engaging with parents, as well as providing them with information in a variety of ways. This includes phone calls, printed material, and home visits. Christenson & Sheridan (2001) also emphasized the importance of providing this information in a user-friendly format. This idea was also promoted by teachers and school staff in this study, who desired to provide information in a clear and understandable way. Based on parents' feedback during this study, such sessions could focus on understanding how CBM data are used, discussing the assessment schedule, and demonstrating effective strategies to support specific academic difficulties at home. Additionally, parents could share information to help educate other parents about these topics. In this study, parents indicated that they often talked to each other about the ongoing events and issues in their child's classroom, feedback from teachers, and

strategies for home. Christenson & Sheridan (2001) recommended providing this information through formally established parent groups at school. Nominated parents could act as ambassadors to other parents in providing desired information to a larger group of parents. All in all, there are a variety of ways that schools can assist in preparing parents to become better informed about their child's progress and more effective decision-makers in conjunction with school staff.

Tiered Model for Working with Parents Systemically

Although research studies have not investigated the effects of a system-wide tiered model for parental involvement, it seems that this could be effective, based on the results of the present study and previous studies that have been discussed. Christenson (2010) emphasized the components of Rtl that align well with meaningful parental involvement: early and ongoing information-sharing and collaborative problem-solving. She suggested that the empirical and theoretical basis for Rtl naturally aligns with effective parental involvement practices. According to Christenson (2010), schools should not take a "one size fits all" approach to parental involvement practices, much like schools' Rtl processes emphasize differentiated instruction and tiered intervention for students based on specific educational needs.

Christenson's (2010) tiered model suggests that, at the universal level (Tier 1), schools should demonstrate effective home-school communication practices with all parents. This includes utilizing successful communication strategies with each parent as well as establishing a system-wide protocol for communicating with parents. An example of a system-wide protocol was in place at the school used for the present study. Christenson (2010) further recommended formulating this system-wide protocol after conducting a needs assessment with parents about their involvement practices.

She also emphasized the importance of re-visiting the protocol periodically to determine if the system was meeting the needs of the majority of parents. And if not, then additional assessments would be conducted to tailor the protocol.

A school-wide communication protocol will likely look different in every setting, but based on the results of this study, would be essential in instilling open lines of communication with parents and clearing up common points of misinformation. Parents in this study indicated that they appreciated direct, face-to-face contact with teachers when receiving the CBM sheet, but that this occurred only one time in the fall. They also said that the CBM sheet was a useful “layer” in understanding their child’s progress, but that they often asked questions about the critical skill areas of reading as measured by CBM. They also wanted to know specific strategies about how to support their child’s learning at home in particular skills. Furthermore, parents expressed a general understanding about their child’s intervention services, but did not use the language of RtI and indicated that they did not know what RtI was or what it meant for their child. In a practical sense, establishing a sound, effective school-wide communication protocol might incorporate all of these elements. In the beginning of the school year, all parents could be invited to a grade-level meeting to learn about tiered intervention services, the RtI process, and CBM. While teachers and school staff could introduce parents to the vocabulary of RtI (e.g., multi-tiered intervention, progress monitoring), they could also present the information in a clear, parent-friendly format while encouraging parents to ask questions. At this meeting, all parents could receive a handbook or web-based resources that provides useful information about RtI and answers common questions. Parents could also be provided with information that describes specific strategies to

help their child at home in the five major areas of reading. This information, as well as sample questions that assess reading skills via CBM, could also be posted on the school's website for parents' access. As a result, at the fall parent-teacher conference, all parents would receive their child's data from the CBM sheet after having learned background information about RtI processes. Common suggestions for supporting learning at home could also be provided on the back of the CBM sheet.

Another major element of establishing a school-wide communication protocol would be preparing teachers to use honest, effective communication strategies. Teachers in this study often focused on the child's positive qualities and academic progress, and parents ultimately took away that same perception from their child's data. However, some parents did not fully understand the gravity of their child's struggles based on the data alone. Support staff indicated that teachers often needed consultation or other forms of assistance to communicate with parents when the child's data were suggestive of significant difficulties. Teachers seemed to struggle with balancing how to build a positive and trusting relationship with parents, while being straightforward and honest about the child's data. When this occurred, parents sometimes received mixed messages about their child's progress over the years. A comprehensive communication protocol would also contain preparation for teachers and support staff about how to communicate honestly with parents in difficult or uncomfortable situations. This would be especially important for teachers, given their day-to-day communication with parents in formal and informal ways.

At the targeted level (Tier 2), schools would respond to parents with the most specific needs. For parents in this study, this could be exemplified by parents who

expressed a need for additional information to be successfully involved in their child's education or by parents who expressed strong emotional ties to their child's data. Christenson (2010) suggested that school staff "respond to family-identified priorities to assist children's learning" (p.22). That is, teachers and school staff listen to parents' concerns, hear their voices, and collaborate to effectively support parents in ways that the parents find valuable. Again, some parents simply require additional consultation in order to better understand their child's needs and ways to become involved in educational decision-making. In a practical sense, it would be important to assess parents' needs throughout the year to determine who would benefit from additional consultation or information. This could be completed by asking parents to complete a parent information/involvement survey or conducting small focus groups after the release of each CBM sheet. In assessing parents' needs, schools can better determine gaps in their practices and better plan for meaningful parent involvement. In addition, if a group of parents have common needs, schools can be creative in answering their questions. At the Tier 2 level, it would be possible to integrate the use of parent to parent support groups to answer questions about ways to support learning at home or how to explain RtI in clear ways. Volunteer parents who were educated about RtI could also be responsible for answering questions through the use of an online dropbox system or for directing questions to appropriate school staff.

Finally, at the intensive level (Tier 3), parents who need concentrated and ongoing support are receiving the most time and services from schools. Much like the RtI process, the number of parents who should require this amount of support is small. As Christenson (2010) states:

persistent outreach, ongoing sharing of information and resources, and solution-oriented problem solving directed toward a genuine interest in improving the child's success and school experience are necessary to engage parents for some students. We have also learned that ongoing support reflected in trusting relationships empower disengaged parents; they begin to believe in their capacity to make a difference (p. 23).

Some parents require direct and frequent support from school staff to be able to understand information from their child's school and participate effectively in decision-making. In this study, parents receiving Tier 3 services might be those parents whose students are receiving Tier 3 academic intervention. And, as with the Tier 2 support, parents' needs should be frequently assessed to determine what information or services would be most helpful for them to understand their child's data and become more meaningfully involved in decision-making. Again, this model has not been examined fully, but pieces of the system-wide, tiered model make sense, especially for school staff that want to establish a school-wide process for engaging parents in meaningful and innovative ways.

Limitations and Future Research

Because this study was exploratory in nature and because research on its topic is scant, the need for future research in this area remains. While this study provides an in-depth examination of the parental involvement practices during one school's Rtl process, it will be beneficial to gain a more comprehensive understanding about these practices to strengthen research-based practices in schools nationwide. In addition, despite the rigorous methods that were employed to insure that this study was sound and its data analyzed reliably, there were limitations to the study.

First, while the participants provided rich, in-depth information regarding their experiences during the Rtl process, one cannot overlook their demographic similarities.

While the school population is racially/ethnically and economically diverse, the majority of the parent participants in this study were markedly similar. All were female and mothers. All had a high school education and at least some sort of postsecondary work. Most were Caucasian, and only one parent was African-American. However, despite this high degree of similarity, parents presented a wide range of perspectives that are presented in the findings. The parents in this study also reported perspectives and experiences that were similar to results of previous research, such as wanting academic information as early as possible, desiring to take on a more active role in their child's education, and expressing a high level of satisfaction when they were involved early in problem-solving for their child (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Dowd-Eagle, 2007; Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Second, DRS is a school setting that is unique to most public schools. As discussed previously, it has close ties with a local university. Thus, the faculty pride themselves on implementing innovative and research-based practices in the classroom and at the school-wide level. Funding for research projects often comes from outside grants or is initiated at the university level, so the ability to implement research projects at this school is different than most. There is also a high sense of collaboration among its faculty, who are also more highly educated than typical school faculty as many hold advanced degrees. It is important to understand these characteristics because they set DRS apart from other schools and also situate the unique perspectives of the participants in this study. Furthermore, this school had gradually implemented components of Rtl well before the mandated implementation of the process. Thus, teachers and staff received professional development training prior to implementation

and also gained exposure to the theoretical relevance of multi-tiered intervention before they were “required” to use it in their classrooms. Clearly, support and buy-in of Rtl was much different at this school than the typical school, which likely impacted the results of this study.

This qualitative research study provided an exploratory and in-depth look at parents’ involvement within a school’s Rtl process. In particular, the research explored parents’ experiences with data and decision-making during this process. Few studies exist that have examined parents’ roles during the Rtl process. And, while studies have examined traditional home-school communication and decision-making practices, they have not been examined within this newly required service delivery framework. Due to the lack of research in this area and the fact that Rtl is required to be implemented in public schools, it is imperative to continue to build on the current, yet small research base.

This study examined the experiences of parents within one school’s Rtl process. The setting is unique in that it is a developmental research school with strong connections to the local university. These ties allow for rare opportunities for funding and research-based practices that are sometimes not afforded to the typical school. In addition, because of the nature of the school and enrollment practices, parents at this school are typically more involved in the day-to-day events of the school than in many other schools. Therefore, it would be helpful for future research to examine other, more typical public schools implementing Rtl processes to explore whether similarities in parental experiences exist between settings.

It also would be informative for future research to examine what occurs during decision-making meetings with parents present. In this study, parents and teachers provided parallel explanations about the purpose, goals, and outline of parent-teacher conferences. Parents and teachers also described student progress in remarkably similar ways. However, it would be important to research these events to better understand how professionals' attitudes and actions impact parent participation. It would also allow for long-term observation of parents as part of the decision-making team. The development of that team over time, in particular the roles that parents play, would be valuable to investigate.

In addition, participating teachers in this study were highly educated and experienced in the field. Their experiences with RtI ranged from postgraduate classwork to professional development classes to personal research. They were highly motivated to be successful in implementing elements of the RtI process within their classrooms and also expressed confidence regarding these techniques. However, it would be interesting to see how newer, less experienced teachers view their roles within RtI and consequently interact with parents throughout the process. And, for those teachers who have been involved in professional development regarding RtI or parental involvement practices, it would be important to look at the effectiveness of teacher training on parent satisfaction with home-school communication patterns about academic progress data. Similarly, if parents are afforded the opportunity to gain a better understanding about the RtI process, including CBM data and ways to participate in the problem-solving process, their opinions should be investigated. For example, what factors assist parents in becoming more involved with collaboration efforts with their child's school? What do

parents know about RtI? What resources do other schools use to facilitate teacher-parent communication or help parents understand the RtI process?

Overall, this study provides an exploratory examination of parents' experiences with data and decision-making in an RtI process. The results of this study will be useful in helping schools understand parents' needs and desires throughout the RtI process; however, it is important for future research to expand upon this topic so that educational professionals can continue to improve upon their practices in working with parents in innovative and meaningful ways.

APPENDIX A
LETTERS OF INFORMED CONSENT

Parent Form

November 2010

Dear Parent:

The purpose of this letter is to obtain your consent for participation in a qualitative research study that will take place during the Spring 2011 semester. The goal of this study is to examine parents' experiences in understanding information about their child's academic progress as well as their participation in educational decision-making for their child throughout the Response to Intervention (Rtl) process. If you agree to participate, you will be involved in the following:

Interviews: Initial interviews will be conducted with individual participants in January or February. Additional interviews will likely occur near the middle and end of the semester, and will be scheduled with the interviewer based on participant availability. Each interview will last approximately 30-90 minutes and will be audiotaped and transcribed. All identifying information will be removed from the transcriptions.

Observations: The researcher will be present at informal and formal educational decision-making meetings for your child. The purpose of this is to take notes about the Rtl process and to provide information for future interview questions.

Follow-up/feedback: The interviewer will send individual transcriptions to participants. This is done so that the participants can check the accuracy of the statements made and make any comments about the data.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. The primary benefit in participating is that you will be able to provide helpful insight into future practices of schools regarding parent involvement practices within an Rtl framework. I do not perceive that there are any risks in your participation. However, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You will not be provided compensation for your participation. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law.

Please sign and return this letter. A second copy of the letter is provided to you for your records. If you have any questions about the study or the procedures for data collection, please contact the investigator, Susan Craft (859 380-7060 or susancraft@ufl.edu) or the faculty supervisor, Nancy Waldron, Ph.D. (352 273-4284 or waldron@coe.ufl.edu). If you have any questions about the rights of research participants in this study, please contact the University of Florida Institutional Review Board (UFIRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250 or 352 392-0433).

Sincerely,

Susan A. Craft
Graduate Student, University of Florida School Psychology Program

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Teacher Form

November 2010

Dear Teacher:

The purpose of this letter is to obtain your consent for participation in a qualitative research study that will take place during the Spring 2011 semester. The goal of this study is to examine parents' experiences in understanding information about their child's academic progress as well as their participation in educational decision-making for their child throughout the Response to Intervention (Rtl) process. If you agree to participate, you will be involved in the following:

Interviews: Initial interviews will be conducted with individual participants in January or February. Additional interviews will likely occur near the middle and end of the semester, and will be scheduled with the interviewer based on participant availability. Each interview will last approximately 30-90 minutes and will be audiotaped and transcribed. All identifying information will be removed from the transcriptions.

Observations: The researcher will be present at informal and formal educational decision-making meetings for the student in your classroom. The purpose of this is to take notes about the Rtl process and to provide information for future interview questions.

Follow-up/feedback: The interviewer will send individual transcriptions to participants. This is done so that the participants can check the accuracy of the statements made and make any comments about the data.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. The primary benefit in participating is that you will be able to provide helpful insight into future practices of schools regarding parent involvement practices within an Rtl framework. I do not perceive that there are any risks in your participation. However, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You will not be provided compensation for your participation. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law.

Please sign and return this letter. A second copy of the letter is provided to you for your records. If you have any questions about the study or the procedures for data collection, please contact the investigator, Susan Craft (859 380-7060 or susancraft@ufl.edu) or the faculty supervisor, Nancy Waldron, Ph.D. (352 273-4284 or waldron@coe.ufl.edu). If you have any questions about the rights of research participants in this study, please contact the University of Florida Institutional Review Board (UFIRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250 or 352 392-0433).

Sincerely,

Susan A. Craft
Graduate Student, University of Florida School Psychology Program

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Dear School Professional:

The purpose of this letter is to obtain your consent for participation in a qualitative research study that will take place during the Spring 2011 semester. The goal of this study is to examine parents' experiences in understanding information about their child's academic progress as well as their participation in educational decision-making for their child throughout the Response to Intervention (Rtl) process. If you agree to participate, you will be involved in the following:

Interviews: Interviews will likely occur near the middle and end of the semester, and will be scheduled with the interviewer based on participant availability. Each interview will last approximately 30-90 minutes and will be audiotaped and transcribed. All identifying information will be removed from the transcriptions.

Observations: The researcher will be present at informal and formal educational decision-making meetings for the students with whom you have been involved. The purpose of this is to take notes about the Rtl process and to provide information for future interview questions.

Follow-up/feedback: The interviewer will send individual transcriptions to participants. This is done so that the participants can check the accuracy of the statements made and make any comments about the data.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. The primary benefit in participating is that you will be able to provide helpful insight into future practices of schools regarding parent involvement practices within an Rtl framework. I do not perceive that there are any risks in your participation. However, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You will not be provided compensation for your participation. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law.

Please sign and return this letter. A second copy of the letter is provided to you for your records. If you have any questions about the study or the procedures for data collection, please contact the investigator, Susan Craft (859 380-7060 or susancraft@ufl.edu) or the faculty supervisor, Nancy Waldron, Ph.D. (352 273-4284 or waldron@coe.ufl.edu). If you have any questions about the rights of research participants in this study, please contact the University of Florida Institutional Review Board (UFIRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250 or 352 392-0433).

Sincerely,

Susan A. Craft
Graduate Student, University of Florida School Psychology Program

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORMS

Parent Form

Initials _____

Age _____

I am a _____.

- Female
- Male

My race/ethnicity is _____.

- African-American
- Asian/Asian-American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Multi Racial
- Other. Please specify: _____

The highest level of education I have completed is _____.

- Some high school
- High school
- Some college
- College
- Graduate/professional school

Please indicate the number of children in your family and their corresponding grade levels.

Teacher Form

Initials _____

Age _____

I am a _____.

Female

Male

My race/ethnicity is _____.

African-American

Asian/Asian-American

Caucasian

Hispanic

Native American

Multi Racial

Other. Please specify: _____

How many years have you been teaching? _____

How many years have you been teaching at DRS? _____

How many years have you been involved with Response to Intervention (Rtl) implementation? _____

Briefly describe your involvement with the Rtl process

School Personnel Form

Initials _____

Age _____

I am a _____.

Female

Male

My race/ethnicity is _____.

African-American

Asian/Asian-American

Caucasian

Hispanic

Native American

Multi Racial

Other. Please specify: _____

How many years have you been employed as an educational professional?

How many years have you been employed at DRS? _____

How many years have you been involved with Response to Intervention (Rtl) implementation? _____

Briefly describe your involvement with the Rtl process

APPENDIX C INTERVIEW GUIDES

Parent Interview Guide (Initial)

Today I'd like to talk to you about your perceptions and understanding of the information that you receive from your child's school regarding their academic progress.

1. First, how many children do you have at DRS? How old are they and what grades are they in?
2. Schools are very focused on academic achievement these days, and we see lots of academic information about students in first grade. Talk to me about the information you receive from the school about your child's academic progress.
3. Tell me how you've developed an understanding about how your child is achieving in school.
4. Talk to me about your child's academic performance.
5. What are the academic difficulties that your child has?
6. Tell me about the support your child is getting at the school to address their needs.
7. Tell me a little bit about your contact with your child's teacher.
8. One thing the teachers send home is this. (Show CBM sheet). Talk to me about this.
9. What information do you have to understand the CBM sheet?
10. What do you make of all the information that has come to you from conferences, meetings at school, report cards, home folders, and the progress monitoring sheets?
11. What information do you value most when developing an understanding of your child's academic performance?
12. Describe any questions that you have about this information.
13. What other information would be important for you as a parent to have to understand your child's academic progress?

Teacher Interview Guide

Today I'd like to talk to you about your perspectives about communicating with parents about their child's academic progress.

1. First, talk to me about your goals for communicating with parents.
2. Schools are very focused on academic achievement these days, and we see lots of academic information about students in first grade. Talk to me about the information you deliver to parents about their child's academic progress.
3. Talk to me about how you present this information.
 - a. Query: Tell me a little bit about why you present the information in the way you do.
4. Tell me a little bit about your contact with parents throughout the year.
5. Describe the supports that students in your classroom get to address their academic needs.
6. Tell me about the ways that parents are involved in your classroom.
7. From your perspective, what information do you value most when developing an understanding of a student's academic performance?
8. What information do you think is most valuable for the parents to help them understand their child's academic progress?
9. What issues have you encountered when explaining academic progress data?
10. Describe any questions that parents commonly ask you about the information they receive.
11. One thing parents receive is this. (Show CBM sheet for each student individually). What do you make of the information on here for this student?
12. Discuss the resources that are available to parents to understand this information.

Other School Staff Interview Guide

Today I'd like to talk to you about your perspectives about communicating with parents about their child's academic progress as well as parent involvement in educational decision-making.

1. Talk to me about your goals for communicating with parents.
2. Describe your expectations for communicating with parents.
3. What do you see as teacher expectations for communicating with parents?
4. Describe what you think teachers are communicating to parents about their child's academic progress data.
5. How do you think the first grade teachers describe the academic supports a child is receiving to parents?
6. What information do you think is most important to be communicated to parents?
7. What information do you think is most valuable for the parents to help them develop an understanding of their child's academic progress?
8. Talk about the issues that parents bring up to you regarding communication.
9. Talk about the issues that parents bring up to you regarding decision-making.
10. Tell me a little bit about your contact with first grade parents throughout the year.
11. Tell me about your interactions with first grade parents at various meetings this year.
12. Describe the ways that parents are involved at DRS during first grade.

SAIL Parent Interview Guide (Follow-up)

Today I'd like to talk with you about your experiences with your child's academic progress information and your participation in decision-making since the last time we talked.

1. First, talk to me about the academic progress information you've received about your child from the middle of the year until now.
2. Share your impressions about this now (show end of year CBM sheet).
3. Tell me about your contact with your child's teacher since the middle of the year.
4. Discuss your involvement in the educational decisions that have been made for your child this year.
5. Talk to me about what you see as your roles in your child's education.
6. Tell me a little bit about the SAIL program.
7. Tell me about your child's participation in the SAIL program this summer.
8. Discuss the information have you received about your child since participating in SAIL.
9. Talk to me about what will happen after the end of the SAIL program.
10. Describe any questions you have about the information you've received.
11. What are your expectations for next year at DRS?
12. This year you've encountered a variety of sources of academic progress information, interventions for your child, and meetings at school. How would you want this process to be different? What would be ideal for you?

APPENDIX D
SAMPLE CBM SHEET

DRS School
1st Grade Progress Monitoring Assessment Report
School Year: 2010-2011

Student:

Teacher:

Assessment	1 st Quarter October		2 nd Quarter January		3 rd Quarter March		4 th Quarter June	
	Your child's score	On Grade Level score	Your child's score	On Grade Level score	Your child's score	On Grade Level score	Your child's score	On Grade Level score
<i>Fox in the Box</i> Sight Words		30		40		45		50
<i>Fox in the Box</i> Decoding		15 + 6		20 + 8		25 + 10		30 + 12
<i>Fox in the Box</i> Spelling		12		18		18-24		24
DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency		24		50		50		50
DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency				20		25		40
Your Child's Reading Level		C		E-G		F-H		I
In READING your child is working	BELOW Grade Level	ON/ABOVE Grade Level	BELOW Grade Level	ON/ABOVE Grade Level	BELOW Grade Level	ON/ABOVE Grade Level	BELOW Grade Level	ON/ABOVE Grade Level
<i>Everyday Mathematics</i> Individual Profile of Progress		80%		80%		80%		80%
In MATH your child is working	BELOW Grade Level	ON/ABOVE Grade Level	BELOW Grade Level	ON/ABOVE Grade Level	BELOW Grade Level	ON/ABOVE Grade Level	BELOW Grade Level	ON/ABOVE Grade Level
Additional Instruction <i>(provided for students working</i>								

<i>below grade level)</i>				
Please sign & return				

<p>Fox in a Box Sight Words</p>	<p>Students are shown a list of beginning sight words (e.g., <i>the, you, me, he, one, said, would</i>). These words appear most frequently in our written language and are essential to a student’s foundation as a reader.</p>
<p>Fox in a Box Decoding</p> <p><i>cvc=rug, cat, hop</i> blends & digraphs=sh, th, ch, st, tr, dr, sc <i>cvce=hike, tale, rope</i> <i>cvvc=boat, train, keep</i></p>	<p>Students are shown a series of words and nonwords and are asked to sound them out and read them. Learning how to “sound out” unfamiliar words is essential to beginning reading. Without this skill, students are unable to teach themselves new words. Students’ phonics skills improve as they learn more about how to read words. First, students learn to associate sounds with individual letters. Later, they learn to associate sounds with letter combinations. By the end of second grade, students are expected to recognize most common sound-spelling patterns. Your child’s score indicates the following: words + nonwords</p>
<p>Fox in a Box Spelling</p>	<p>The teacher calls out words for students to spell. The spelling assessment measures students’ increasing use of correct spelling conventions (e.g., <i>th, ch, tr, sp, ing, ed, ay</i>).</p>
<p>DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency</p>	<p>Students are shown a series of three-letter, nonwords with short vowel sounds (e.g., <i>pid, jut, cam</i>). The teacher counts how many of the nonwords the student accurately reads or sounds out in one minute. This is a standardized measure that allows us to measure how an individual student compares to thousands of typical first grade students.</p>
<p>DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency</p>	<p>Students are given one minute to read a selected first grade story. Students do this three times in a row with three different stories. The teacher records how many words are read correctly in one minute. Students’ reading accuracy and automaticity (how quickly and easily they read) strongly correlate with future reading comprehension. Measuring how many words are read correctly on a grade level story is an assessment measure that has been repeatedly studied by researchers. The “on grade level scores” are derived from a national sample of thousands of first grade students.</p>
<p>Your Child’s Reading Level</p>	<p>It is important to identify the reading level of individual students so that we can be sure that students have opportunities to read books that are just right for them. Books that are too hard for students frustrate them and make it impossible for them to continue to grow as a reader. Books that are too easy provide opportunities for students to build their reading fluency but do not provide a learning challenge. The reading level system we use has been developed and researched by reading experts and has been adopted by many school districts throughout the United States.</p>
<p>Everyday Mathematics Individual Profile of Progress</p>	<p>The Individual Profile of Progress is provided by the publisher of our math series. Classroom teachers measure student mastery of math skills with end-of-unit tests and one-on-one alternative assessments. Students are expected to demonstrate their understanding of targeted skills in a variety of ways. Adequate progress is measured towards end of year goals. Students are considered to be “on grade level” if they demonstrate Adequate Progress (AP) for at least 80% of the grade level goals.</p>

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Susan Alexandria Craft was born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Daughter of David and Andrea Craft, she grew up as the middle child with two sisters, Mary Beth and Mallory. She spent her childhood years in Fort Thomas, Kentucky and graduated from Covington Latin School in 2003. From there, she went on to attend Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Susan graduated cum laude from Miami University in 2007, earning Bachelor of Arts degrees (B.A.) in psychology and comparative religion. Afterward, Susan began her graduate studies at the University of Florida. She earned her Master of Education degree (M.Ed.) in school psychology in 2010. To finalize her formal graduate training, Susan completed a 12-month internship with the School District of Hillsborough County in Tampa, Florida. Susan obtained her Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D.) in school psychology from the University of Florida in August 2012.