

ABSTRACT

Jeremy B. Johnson, A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT IN PAMLICO COUNTY SCHOOLS (Under the direction of Dr. Jim McDowelle). Department of Educational Leadership, February 2018.

Over the past six years, student proficiency in reading has been a problem in the Pamlico County School District. To address this problem an instructional framework known as Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) was implemented. Despite this implementation, students continue to struggle with reading. In an effort to understand why MTSS has been ineffective in improving reading proficiency, a program evaluation was conducted to determine areas of strength and weakness.

The CIPP approach to program evaluation was selected for this study. CIPP is a four-part evaluation process that studies the Context, Input, Process, and Product of the program that is being evaluated. The methods for data collection in this study involved surveys and interviews of administrators and teachers in the Pamlico County School District. Archival data such as End-of-Grade test scores were also analyzed.

Several themes emerged from the results of this evaluation. These themes included inconsistent leadership, little training for staff members, and staff turnover. Recommendations for improvement were developed from the evaluation. These include the development of a vision for MTSS in the district, proper training for staff members and consistent staffing in the schools.

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM
OF SUPPORT IN PAMLICO COUNTY SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership
East Carolina University

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by

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DEDICATION

I would like to thank my wife, Ashley, for her unwavering support, love, and patience as I embarked on this journey. I am thankful for my two sons, Noah and Wyatt who make me strive every day to be a better man. The unconditional love of my family and their faith in me have sustained me and given me the motivation to pursue my goals.

I am nothing without my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom all glory and praise must be given. I thank God for giving me the strength and ability to complete this dissertation. I am blessed far more than I will ever deserve.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The ability to read is one of the skills that is too often taken for granted. It is a skill that is easily acquired by some but, sadly, seems almost out of reach for others. For some individuals, reading becomes an involuntary response. When words are seen, they are immediately processed. It is just like breathing. For others, reading is a puzzle that they are never quite able to solve. The challenge for educators is to help students break this code. The unfortunate reality is that it seems to be a tough code to crack with serious consequences. In fact, according to Bursuck and Damer (2015), the ability to read really only comes naturally to about 5% of the population. Another 20 to 30% of students learn to read with relative ease, meaning that it really doesn't matter what type of reading program is used. They will simply learn to read. For another 20 to 30% of students, learning to read requires tremendous effort. These students need extra support with research-based core reading programs. The next 30% of students will only learn to read with intensive support. These students need sustained, one-on-one instruction with intense interventions in order to be successful. Finally, the remaining 5% of students are going to struggle regardless of what interventions are used. These students often have pervasive reading disabilities that are going to make learning to read a challenge for the rest of their lives. These statistics indicate that teaching children to read is no small task. However, it is a critical one (Bursuck & Damer, 2015).

In addition to statistics on reading and problems associated with teaching children to read, there are also statistics that illustrate the impact that quality reading instruction can have on an individual as well as the problems that exist when individuals fail to receive proper reading instruction (Hernandez, 2011). The Literacy Project (2008) has published statistics that clearly

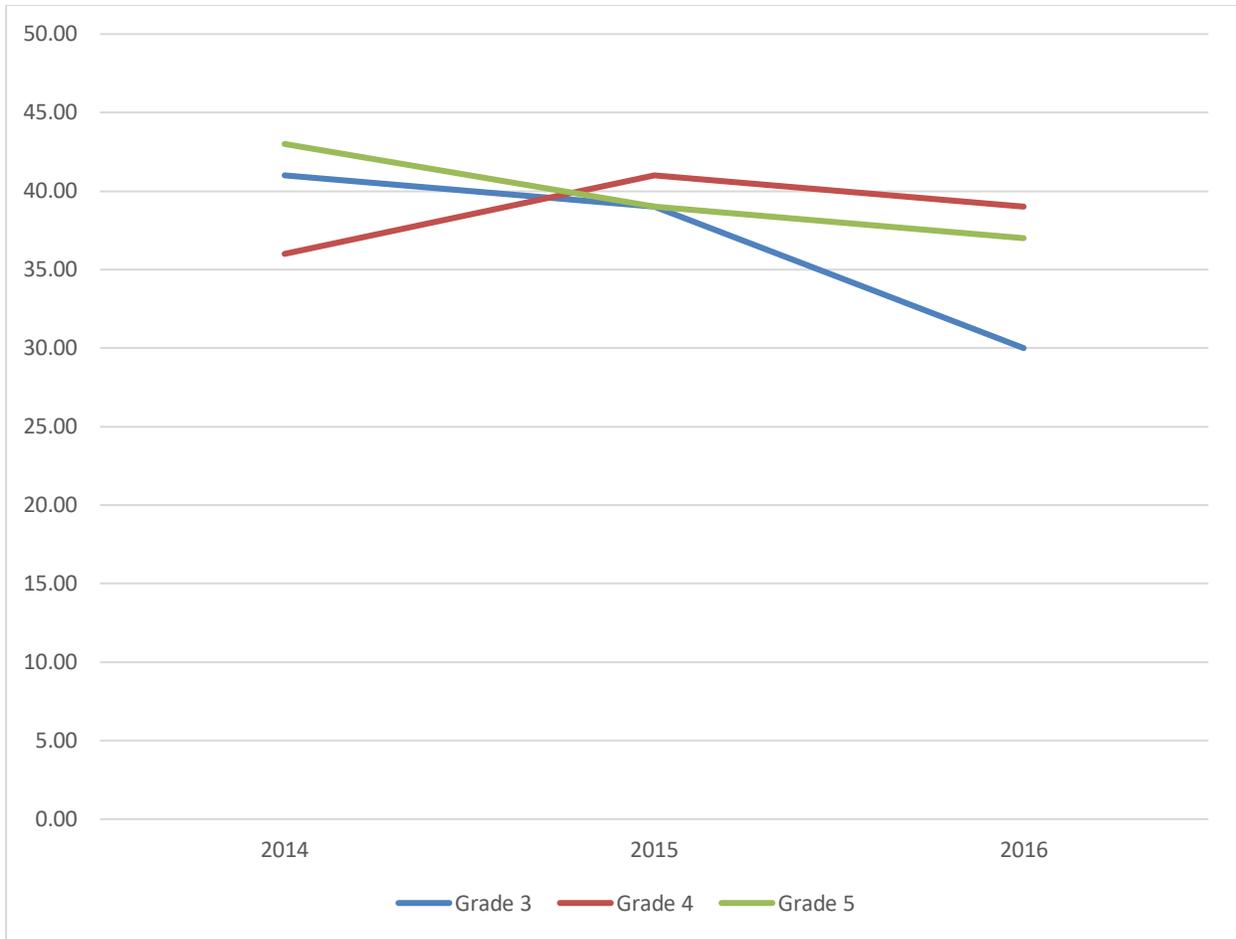
illustrate that illiteracy has far reaching consequences on our society, our economy, and our nation. Some of the more interesting statistics include:

- 3 out of 5 individuals in prison are functionally illiterate;
- 85% of juvenile offenders have demonstrated problems in learning to read;
- 3 out of 4 people on welfare can't read;
- 50% of adults cannot read a book written at the eighth grade level;
- Illiteracy costs American taxpayers nearly 20 billion dollars each year (The Literacy Project, 2008).

These statistics are alarming on a number of levels. Illiteracy is a problem that spans miles and generations. It is a problem in large metropolitan areas and in rural communities across the country. These statistics also show that illiteracy is solidly linked to poverty. Essentially, a virtual caste system has been created that each generation struggles to break. Rural eastern NC is no exception. In Pamlico County, students are having a difficult time learning to read based on state assessment data (see Figure 1). Local schools are working hard to reverse this trend and break the chains of illiteracy that, if left unchecked, will continue to make statistics of the local population.

Local Demographics and Conditions

Pamlico County, North Carolina is situated on a peninsula in the southeastern part of the state. Bordering the Neuse River and the Pamlico Sound, the county historically supports a strong fishing industry. Agriculture is also a major part of the local economy. With just under 13,000 people, the population of the county has been fairly constant over the past ten years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The county is served by a small public school system with just over 1,300 enrolled students. The school system consists of four schools; Pamlico County Primary School,



Note. Department of Public Instruction. (2016b). *NC School Report Cards*. Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/src/>

Figure 1. End of grade reading proficiency for Pamlico County Schools College & Career Ready (Grades 3-5).

Fred A. Anderson Elementary School, Pamlico County Middle School, and Pamlico County High School. Demographic information reveals that the system is 77% white and 22% African American. A majority of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged as all students in grades K-12 receive free breakfast and lunch through the Community Eligibility Provision, a meal service option provided by the United States Department of Agriculture to school districts with the highest poverty levels. A large percentage of students in the district have difficulties in reading, as demonstrated by reading scores that tend to rank below the state average in most grades. For example, in grades 3-5, 51% of students were considered *Grade Level Proficient* on End-Of-Grade Assessments for the 2013-14 school year. However, the NC Department of Public Instruction considered only 39.8% of these students taking the test to be *College & Career Ready*. Put simply, this means that the vast majority of the students who took the exam are not considered to be proficient readers and are not prepared for the rigors of college and careers in the 21st century. This is an alarming statistic that must be addressed urgently.

Figure 1 further illustrates the gross underachievement of students in Pamlico County on End of Grade Assessments for the past three years. This graph depicts results of NC End of Grade Assessments for Reading in Grades 3-5 for Pamlico County Schools from 2014-2016. The results are reported in percentages of students scoring at Levels 4 & 5 on the assessment. Levels 4 & 5 indicate solid and superior command of knowledge and skills. Students performing at levels 4 & 5 are considered to be at or above grade level and are well prepared for the next grade level. The state of North Carolina also considers these students to be on a path for college and/or career by the time they graduate from high school (NC Department of Public Instruction, 2016b). Examining this data reveals that the majority of students in Pamlico County are not considered

college or career ready. In fact, each grade (3-5) consistently remains under 45% proficient in reading. Unfortunately, this statistic is not a one-year anomaly but a trend that must be reversed.

When one reviews this data, the results in Pamlico County are in line with the aforementioned research regarding students who struggle to learn to read. Studies show that 35% of students have little to no difficulties in learning to read (Bursuck & Damer, 2015). This holds true in Pamlico County. The problem is that students who must have explicit instruction and structured interventions in order to learn to read are not finding success (see Figure 1). In an effort to correct this problem, an initiative for total school improvement is underway. This initiative, known as a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a framework for total school improvement. The district first implemented MTSS in 2012 in grades k-5. The program is designed to provide differentiated core instruction for the benefit of all learners. MTSS also puts a system in place to identify at-risk students and help them succeed.

MTSS is not simply a local initiative. North Carolina is poised to require all districts to implement MTSS in all grades over the next few years. In addition to its school improvement properties, NC State Board of Education policy now allows the use of MTSS as a component of the comprehensive evaluation process for evaluating and identifying students with specific learning disabilities. This specific policy became effective on February 5, 2016 and must be fully implemented in all school districts and charter schools by July 1, 2020. Therefore, it is appropriate to study the existing program and identify its strengths and weaknesses in order to make sound decisions for the future.

Description of the Program

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), which has evolved from Response to Intervention (RTI), is an educational philosophy that has been adopted by many school systems

in the United States in recent years. MTSS and RTI are terms that are often used interchangeably, although there is a distinction between the two. MTSS includes strategies and interventions for behavior as well as academic support. As the name suggests, MTSS is a multi-tiered model that provides increasing levels of support for students as needed and determined by school benchmarks (Haynes, 2012). Many see MTSS as the best answer to help all students to be successful in the classroom.

The underlying premise of MTSS is that schools should not wait for students to fail before providing them with help. They should instead provide specific interventions to students as soon as they demonstrate need (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010). In this way, students receive the help that they need promptly and in a manner that is designed for them.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this study will be to evaluate the Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS) program of Pamlico County Schools to determine its capacity to positively impact reading proficiency in students. A program evaluation is needed to gauge the effectiveness of the process and give direction to the district as MTSS expands beyond its current implementation boundary in Grade 5 to include grades K-12. Unlike some program evaluations that determine the worth or merit of a program, the goal of this study will be to inform decision makers about the strengths and weaknesses of the current program. Essentially, this evaluation will be diagnostic and formative in nature, so that the program might be improved. Since the inception of MTSS in Pamlico County, students have made very few gains in the area of reading. This is in direct contrast to studies that show that when implemented correctly, students respond favorably to the interventions provided through MTSS (Haynes, 2012). Given the lack of success in reading for a

majority of the students in Pamlico County, a program evaluation is necessary to identify why there has been little progress and to help decision makers remedy this situation moving forward.

In order to make sound decisions regarding the MTSS program, a decision-oriented evaluation approach is appropriate. These evaluations are designed to aid decision makers (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). School districts often espouse *data-driven decision making*. Therefore, this approach to evaluation is most logical. The specific evaluation followed by this study will be the CIPP model. This model, developed by Daniel Stufflebeam in 1973 is one often favored by educational agencies. The primary purpose of this type of evaluation is improvement of the program.

CIPP was developed to serve administrators who face four different kinds of decisions (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). CIPP is an acronym that stands for Context Evaluation, Input Evaluation, Process Evaluation, and Product Evaluation. The evaluation is a mixed methods approach, utilizing quantitative and qualitative data to reach conclusions. Because it is a largely formative process that gives valuable information to those in decision-making roles, it is ideal for this particular problem of practice. The strength of CIPP is that decision-makers do not need to wait for a program to finish before evaluating it (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). The evaluation can help make decisions in the planning stages of programs, which is ideal for the MTSS program in Pamlico County as it plans to make MTSS a district-wide initiative.

Definition of Terms

This study uses a variety of terms to accurately describe the problem, the program, and the evaluation procedures. Terms defined in this section will be used throughout the dissertation.

CIPP Evaluation – An evaluation model developed by Daniel Stufflebeam that was originally designed to be used in educational settings. A decision based-approach, the CIPP

model employs both formative and summative evaluation data through a prescribed framework (Spaulding, 2014).

Context Evaluation – A component of the CIPP evaluation model that serves to plan decisions: determining what needs are to be addressed by a program and what programs already exist helps to define objectives for the program. Context evaluations are concerned with studying the context for a program that has not yet been planned (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

Core Curriculum – A course of study deemed critical and usually made mandatory for all students of a school or school system. Core curricula are often instituted at the primary and secondary levels by school boards, Departments of Education, or other administrative agencies charged with overseeing education. Core curricula must be scientific and research-based (Hughes & Dexter, 2016).

Evaluation – “The process of delineating, obtaining, reporting and applying descriptive and judgmental information about some object’s merit, worth, probity, and significance to guide decision making, support accountability, disseminate effective practices, and increase understanding of the involved phenomena” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011, p. 173).

Formative Evaluation – A type of evaluation where data collection and reporting are focused on the now, providing ongoing, regular feedback to those in charge of delivering the program (Spaulding, 2014).

Input Evaluation – A component of the CIPP evaluation model that serves to structure decisions; input evaluations help managers to select a particular strategy to implement and resolve the problem and make decisions about how to implement it (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

Intervention – The systematic and explicit instruction provided to accelerate growth in an area of identified need. Interventions are provided by both special and general educators, and are

based on training, not titles. They are designed to improve performance relative to a specific, measurable goal. Interventions are based on valid information about current performance, realistic implementation, and include ongoing student progress monitoring (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2014).

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) – a multi-tiered framework, which promotes school improvement through engaging, research-based academic and behavioral practices. MTSS uses a systems approach that employs data-driven problem-solving to maximize academic growth for all students (NCDPI, 2016a).

PBIS – Positive Behavior Intervention and Support; a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based interventions to achieve academically and behaviorally important outcomes for all students (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012).

Process Evaluation – A component of the CIPP evaluation model that serves to implement decisions; process evaluations are conducted after a program has begun. The process evaluation includes such questions as, “Is the program being implemented as planned? What changes have been made? What barriers threaten its success? What revisions are needed?” Answers to these questions aid decision-making (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

Product Evaluation – A component of the CIPP evaluation model that serves to recycle decisions; product evaluations examines results of a program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

Progress Monitoring – A scientifically based practice used to assess students’ academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class. Also defined as the process used to monitor implementation of specific interventions (Dexter & Hughes, 2016).

Program – An ongoing, planned intervention that seeks to achieve some particular outcome in response to some perceived educational, social, or commercial problem (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

RTI – Response to Instruction / Responsiveness to Intervention; Practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions (RTI Action Network, 2016).

Stakeholder – Various individuals and/or groups who have a direct interest in and may be affected by the program being evaluated or the evaluation’s results (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

Summative Evaluation – A type of evaluation where data collection and reporting occur after the program and all activities have taken place (Spaulding, 2014).

Tier 1 (MTSS) – Tier 1 is the first component of MTSS. This tier includes differentiated instruction that is provided for all students (NCDPI, 2016a).

Tier 2 (MTSS) – Tier 2 of MTSS included supplemental instruction or intervention for students who are not meeting benchmark expectations (NCDPI, 2016a)

Tier 3 (MTSS) – Tier 3 of MTSS involves intensive, small group or individual interventions for students showing significant barriers to learning the skills required to be successful in school (NCDPI, 2016a).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to thoroughly evaluate the MTSS process of Pamlico County Schools to assist district administrators in making sound decisions for the direction of the program in the future. The data from this evaluation will be used to improve the MTSS process and directly affect the district's capacity to provide sound reading instruction and interventions to the students. The underlying goal of the study will be to have a positive impact on student reading proficiency by improving MTSS. This literature review provides relevant background information on the importance of literacy instruction. It also provides context for how success in literacy instruction is measured in North Carolina. Furthermore, the literature review provides background information on MTSS and its components, documented challenges associated with MTSS and the correlation of MTSS implementation with reading proficiency.

The Impact of Literacy

A myth exists in our country that says prison administrators use third-grade reading scores to predict the number of prison beds that will be needed in the future (Hudson, 2012). While this is a sensational statement that typically elicits strong emotions from teachers, parents and community members, there is no truth to the statement. However, one could argue that while prisons do not actively seek third-grade enrollment numbers to assist with their planning, they probably could make a pretty accurate prediction if given reading test scores of third grade students. A 2012 study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation published some powerful findings, which support this assertion. The findings include:

- Approximately 16% of children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade do not graduate from high school;

- For children who also grow up in poverty, the proportion of failing to graduate rose to 35%;
- One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade fail to graduate from high school on time, four times the rate for children with proficient third-grade reading skills;
- Children who have lived in poverty and are not reading proficiently in third grade are about three times more likely to dropout or fail to graduate from high school than those who have never been poor.

Another study from 2009 found that high school drop-outs were 63 times more likely to be incarcerated than their college-educated peers (Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, 2009). These statistics indeed make a compelling argument that prisons could actually predict how many beds they will need by analyzing third grade reading scores. When one considers these facts, it is imperative that Pamlico County Schools develop a plan to help break the cycle of illiteracy. A centerpiece of this plan is the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support.

Accountability for Reading Instruction in NC

Success in reading is often measured by a student's performance on a standardized test. These tests assess student mastery of concepts and skills taught during an academic year, aligned to a set standard for specific grades. This system of testing is a primary component of the accountability and assessment program in North Carolina public schools. School accountability was brought to the forefront in NC in 1996 with the introduction of the ABCs of Public Education accountability model. The program was initiated in an effort to measure and improve student and school performance based on a unified and accepted set of standards (NCDPI, 2013). For the first time, schools were held publicly accountable for student academic growth. Over the

next decade the program was adjusted and refined to reflect NC's goals in preparing students for college and careers. In 2012, the NC READY initiative was implemented in all NC public schools. This initiative built upon the ABCs of Public Education, but also brought national standards to NC with the adoption of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. In addition to the standards, new assessments were developed and administered to students to measure their command of grade-level knowledge and skills in the tested areas of ELA, math, and science. Beginning in grade 3, students take an End-of Grade (EOG) examination in ELA and Math. The ELA assessment is designed to measure students' proficiency in their respective grade-level standards. The EOG assessment results are reported using performance standard indicators that provide common meaning for expectations in reading competence. These performance standards or achievement levels are as follows (NCDPI, 2014):

- Level 1 – Students have a limited command of the knowledge and skills contained in the Common Core Standards.
- Level 2 – Students have a partial command of the knowledge and skills contained in the Common Core Standards.
- Level 3 – Students have a sufficient command of the knowledge and skills contained in the Common Core Standards. Students scoring a Level 3 on an EOG assessment are considered to be prepared for the next grade-level, but are not yet considered prepared for college and career. They may require additional academic support to achieve this status.
- Level 4 - Students have a solid command of the knowledge and skills contained in the Common Core Standards and are considered on-track for college and career success.

- Level 5 - Students have a superior command of the knowledge and skills contained in the Common Core Standards. These students are considered on-track for success in college and career when they graduate from high school.

The Components of MTSS

In order to better understand MTSS, one must understand its components, which include Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS). In the following pages, RTI and PBIS will be examined in an effort to understand the purpose, evolution, and relative effectiveness of the programs. The challenges presented by the programs will also be examined, as all of this information is relevant to the program evaluation of MTSS in Pamlico County Schools. As a component of MTSS, PBIS will be included in the literature review, however, it is important to note that the emphasis of this study will be on the RTI component of MTSS and its impact on academic achievement in the area of reading.

RTI as a Component of MTSS

Since its inception, RTI has been closely associated with literacy and reading instruction. The program first emerged in United States in 2002 when No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was first enacted (Samuels, 2011). It was implemented with the Reading First program as a framework for use in literacy programs. In 2004, reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) gave more federal support to the program as it authorized school districts to use RTI as a tool for determining eligibility for special education services. Since then, RTI has been growing in popularity and frequency of use. North Carolina will require all districts to utilize the RTI model over the next two years as a component of NC's MTSS initiative.

The Center for Response to Intervention describes RTI as a multi-level system that integrates assessment and intervention to maximize student achievement. The main idea behind RTI is that schools use data to identify at risk students then deliver research-based interventions before students fail. As a student responds to the intervention, teachers can adjust their instruction to meet the specific needs of the student. In this way, instruction is truly individualized and no students are left behind. A successful RTI program generally consists of four essential components, which make it possible to provide early intervention. These components are a multi-tiered prevention system, universal screening, progress monitoring, and data-based decision-making.

Multi-Tiered Prevention System

The multi-tiered prevention system is the hallmark of the RTI model. It features three levels or tiers of instruction that increase in intensity at each level. Tier 1 represents general education for all students. The Tier 1 instructional program (often referred to as *core instruction*) is the reading or math curriculum that is typically aligned with state standards (Shapiro, 2016). In this tier or level, all students are taught following sound pedagogical practices that feature differentiation. The expectation is that students will receive instruction with high levels of fidelity, with the goal being that 80% of students will be considered proficient. The general expectation for RTI is that if 80% of students are not responding favorably to the differentiated instruction of Tier 1, then the core instruction must be strengthened.

Tier 2 of RTI involves a more specific group of students who receive more intense, specialized interventions. This group of students has not responded satisfactorily to the differentiated core instruction and requires more help. Specifically, these students fall below the expected levels of accomplishment (called benchmarks) and are at some risk for academic failure

(Shapiro, 2016). The needs of these students are identified through the assessment process, and instructional interventions are planned and provided that focus on their specific needs.

Tier 3 of RTI is considered to be a level of intense, focused interventions for small groups of students. In fact, Tier 3 interventions are often provided to students on a one-on-one basis (Shapiro, 2016). These students are considered to be at high risk for academic failure. If these students are not responsive to the Tier 3 interventions, they are considered to be candidates for special education services. In fact, North Carolina has recently adopted policies that include RTI Tier 3 interventions as a component of the identification process for students with specific learning disabilities.

Universal Screening

Another critical component of a successful RTI program involves universal screening of all students. These screenings, or benchmarking as it is often called, are tests given at the beginning of the year, middle of the year, and end of the year to periodically monitor student progress toward specific goals or standards. These screenings provide educators with important data regarding student proficiency. From this data, educators are able to identify students who may be struggling academically and who are in need of intensive interventions (Samuels, 2011). These screenings also serve as official progress monitoring benchmarks that provide information on the effectiveness of the selected interventions. If the data shows that the student is not meeting the desired standards, a series of research-based interventions will be provided to the student in an effort to fix the problem. It is critical that the interventions are delivered with fidelity in order to ensure that the assessment data rendered is valid for decision making.

Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring is another essential component of an effective RTI program. This is a system of frequent formative assessment. Students who receive interventions are regularly assessed to determine the students' responsiveness to intervention. These assessments are typically short in nature and are used to give direction to the teacher as they make plans for instruction and/or continued intervention.

PBIS as a Component of MTSS

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is the other major component of a total MTSS framework. Like RTI, PBIS is a multi-tiered framework intended to improve student achievement. However, where RTI focuses on academic interventions, PBIS is focused on the behaviors of students and how they impact student academic achievement. PBIS, first introduced in the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 can be defined as a framework to enhance the academic performance of students and also enhance their social behaviors. PBIS has three main goals: (1) to improve school climate, (2) Reduce student discipline issues, and (3) to increase academic achievement (Hunt, 2014).

Student behavior is a substantial element of overall student academic success. A number of studies have shown relationships between academic success and positive behavior. In a 2006 study, McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Boland, and Good found definite relationships between poor reading skills and misbehavior. For example, the study found that reading proficiency (or lack thereof) was statistically predictive of Office Discipline Referrals (ODR) in third grade and grew substantially in fourth and fifth grades. This connection between poor academic performance and negative behavior is not isolated to the elementary grades. Tobin and Sugai (1999) completed a study on high school students and found a direct correlation between academic failure and three

or more suspensions in ninth grade. Yet another study reviewed the records of students who were placed in an In-School Suspension Program (ISS). This study found that that students with no previous ODRs performed significantly better and had higher grade point averages than students who had been referred to the office for negative behavior (Morrison, Anthony, Storino, & Dillon, 2001). These studies emphasize the obvious principle that in order for one to be successful in school, one must be present in class. Habitual referrals to the office diminish the amount of contact hours between the student and teacher. Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between student academic engagement and improved academic achievement (Putnam, Horner, & Algozinne, 2015). Students cannot be engaged in learning if they are out of class due to discipline referrals. All of these studies indicate a connection between good behavior and academic success. PBIS is an improvement framework that is proactive in nature, designed to minimize negative behavior before it happens, thereby improving academic achievement.

The Essentials of PBIS

The core principles of PBIS focus on early intervention and prevention of negative behaviors that impact the educational environment. A central premise of PBIS is that appropriate behavior must be taught to children and that children, when taught, can exhibit appropriate behavior. There is great emphasis placed on research-based interventions that have a proven track record of effectiveness with a large number of students. These interventions produce data that is used for decision-making (National Technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavior Interventions and Support, 2016). The underlying goal of PBIS is to increase student achievement by creating a school climate that is void of negative behavior and conducive for learning.

A description of PBIS is extremely similar to RTI. Whole school PBIS is the application of a continuum of positive behavior supports (Bradshaw, Reinke, Brown, Bevens, & Leaf, 2008). The model is three-tiered, like RTI. It includes a primary tier or layer of support that is implemented school-wide. A second layer of support targets smaller groups of students who have exhibited a greater need for intervention. A tertiary layer of support is provided to those students who need intensive intervention to meet their specific, individual behavioral needs (NTAC-PBIS, 2016).

Primary Level of PBIS

Similar to RTI, Tier 1 of PBIS is intended for all students within the school. The goal is to positively affect 80 to 90% of the student population (Hunt, 2014). In this tier, students are taught behavioral expectations and rules. The primary level is all about prevention of negative behaviors. This is accomplished by promoting positive behavioral expectations and consistently enforcing rules and routines. Ideally, three to five behavioral expectations are developed. Their characteristics include that they are easy to remember, positively stated, and significant to the school climate (NTAC-PBIS, 2016). All staff members encourage and reward positive behaviors and provide positive reinforcement. When consequences are required for undesirable behavior, they are consistently and fairly implemented.

Secondary Level of PBIS

The second level of PBIS includes targeted interventions for small groups of students with greater needs. This tier affects approximately 5 to 10% of the student population and provides students with specific interventions to address their behavior. These interventions can include behavior plans, alternatives to suspensions, as well as academic support (Hunt, 2014). Secondary prevention often involves targeted group interventions with a small group of students

implemented by school personnel. The goal of Tier 2 is to have at least 67% of students in Tier 2 respond positively to the interventions (NTAC-PBIS, 2016). In Tier 1 of PBIS, the goal is prevention of new cases of problem behavior, while in Tier 2 the main goal is to reduce current cases of those behaviors. Just like with RTI, when students do not show positive responsiveness to the intervention, they are moved to the next level of the framework for more specialized and intensive intervention.

Tertiary Level of PBIS

The third tier of PBIS provides intensive interventions for individual students (Bradshaw et al., 2008). This tier typically serves 1 to 5% of the student population. Students at this level demonstrate behaviors that are often consistent with certain behavioral disabilities. At this level, the school administers a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and develops for the individual student a behavioral intervention plan (Hunt, 2014). The tertiary level is most effective when Tiers 1 and 2 are in place. This level is a customized level that is designed to serve the individual student. It relies heavily on the cooperation and collaboration of people who know the student best. The goal of tertiary prevention is to diminish problem behavior and enhance the student's ability to adapt and cope with his behavioral challenges (NTAC-PBIS, 2016).

Barriers to MTSS Success

Like many educational initiatives, MTSS is not without its critics and barriers to success. For all of the research that has been done espousing the benefits of MTSS, there are also many studies that depict the shortfalls and challenges that exist to successful implementation. MTSS is often misunderstood, and therefore implemented poorly. Due to the size and scope of the total MTSS framework (which includes two stand-alone school improvement initiatives in RTI and PBIS), misunderstandings often exist which results in a lack of fidelity in implementation.

RTI Barriers

For RTI, research has identified various barriers for implementation, which Castro-Villareal, Rodriguez, and Moore (2014) categorize into themes. These categorizations are the result of a study of teacher perceptions to the barriers that exist for an effective RTI program. These themes include training, time, resources, attitude, and paperwork. Werts, Carpenter, and Fewell found similar responses in their 2014 study on Barriers and Benefits to RTI. Again, teachers identified burdensome processes (time and paperwork), knowledge gaps, and lack of resources as barriers to RTI success. It is clear that successful implementation of MTSS requires an understanding of these barriers and how to overcome them.

Training

The single greatest barrier to successful RTI programs is lack of adequate training (Castro-Villareal et al., 2014). This lack of training includes general knowledge of RTI as well as more specific RTI areas. For example, teachers often cite a lack of training in the use of interventions, progress monitoring methods, and use of assessment instruments as a concern (Werts et al., 2014). This lack of training is not unique to classroom teachers. School administrators frequently have various misconceptions about RTI. Some view RTI as simply a new way to qualify students for special education, only viewing the initiative from a compliance perspective (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010). Therefore, they direct their schools to do just enough to meet legal mandates. Some administrators approach RTI as a means to raise test scores, which too often leads to practices that go against the guiding principles of RTI (Buffum et al., 2010). This confused approach from school leaders has a trickle-down effect that negatively impacts RTI implementation in the schools. Confused leadership results in total confusion. As O'Connor and Freeman state in their 2012 article on RTI Implementation,

“Successful, efficient, and effective RTI systems require district-level leadership and support” (p. 299). In order to effectively provide leadership, educational leaders must have a clear understanding of the fundamentals of RTI and the challenges that exist regarding its implementation.

In addition to training on the various elements of the actual RTI process, successful implementation of RTI is also reliant on adequate training of teachers in delivering sound Tier 1 instruction, particularly in reading. The RTI process makes considerable demands on teachers’ knowledge base about reading (Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2011). These demands are evident in both general classroom instruction as well as in the delivery of interventions. This goes back to the importance of sound core instruction. Therefore, training needs for RTI go beyond the actual RTI process into the core instruction where pedagogical content knowledge is so vitally important. In a 2011 multi-state study of 142 elementary school teachers, Spear-Swerling and Cheesman discovered that most participants showed familiarity with the basic RTI model. However, the majority of the participants lacked other knowledge necessary for effectively implementing RTI. Specifically, they demonstrated weakness in general knowledge for teaching reading and were unfamiliar with research-based instructional methods and interventions that have been proven effective in RTI implementation.

Time

Time is a resource that is often taken for granted when implementing new initiatives. Time (or lack thereof) is often cited as a major barrier to successful RTI programs. Nearly one fourth of respondents in research studies cite time as a problem (Werts et al., 2014). In this sense, time concerns encompass issues related to “time to teach” and “time to deliver interventions.” In addition, another concern identified by Werts et al. (2014) is a problem in delay of services. One

teacher stated, “Many teachers avoid initiating the process due to the time required.” Other time related concerns included all day meetings and lack of time to plan, implement, and gather data (Castro-Villareal et al., 2014). This all indicates that for successful implementation, the master schedule of a school must be scrutinized and optimized for efficiency in time management.

Resources

The third most cited barrier to an effective RTI program is lack of resources (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). In fact, lack of resources is a common theme in multiple studies regarding RTI and the barriers to success. These resources include both human resources and resource materials intended for teaching and interventions. In their study, Castro-Villarreal et al. (2014) quote teachers as stating that there was a general “lack of specialists to follow through with diagnosis and interventions” (p. 108). Similarly, Werts et al. (2014) cited a general lack of funding for instructional materials and personnel to be a significant weakness in the RTI program.

Resource allocation is an aspect of RTI that must also be considered at the district level. A priority must be placed on supporting RTI by district leadership. Unfortunately, districts often overlook policies and procedures related to resource allocation when evaluating district supports for RTI (O’Connor & Freeman, 2012). District leadership has tremendous influence on the success of RTI programs as district-level decisions affect human resource allocation as well as the purchase of commercially available instructional and intervention programs.

Teacher Attitude

Another barrier cited by Castro-Villarreal et al. (2014) deals with teacher attitude. In their study, respondents stated that the “structure of the process is overwhelming” and that there are “too many steps” (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014, p. 108). In addition, some teachers suggested

that the process was unnecessary. These teachers indicated that they believe that the lengthy RTI process ultimately delays special education services for the students who need them. This implies that they believe RTI is only a step that is taken to qualify students for special education services and has no other value or purpose in the school. Similar results were reported in the study by Werts et al. (2014) as they indicated that lack of teacher buy-in appeared to inhibit successful implementation. Some responses included, “Teachers are not willing” and “Teachers are resistant to change” (Werts et al., 2014, p. 6). Furthermore, Werts et al. (2014) found that some teachers were not embracing the RTI process because they anticipated that it “will mean more work for them” (p. 6). Breaking this barrier is essential for success of the program. Without teacher buy-in, most initiatives are doomed to failure.

Burdensome Paperwork

The last major theme of MTSS barriers identified by Castro-Villarreal et al. (2014) is excessive paperwork. Participants in the study stated that the need for constant documentation is difficult to manage. In fact, some respondents described the paperwork as “unmanageable.” Nearly 10% of teachers in another study described paperwork as a major barrier to success. Paperwork in a large number of schools and districts are making RTI unreasonably burdensome (Buffum et al., 2010). In an effort to generate documentation for potential use in the identification process for special education, many school districts have created a laborious paperwork process for every level of student intervention. This RTI barrier has a way of overwhelming teachers and puts incredible demands on their time. One can see that all of the barriers are in many ways interconnected. Burdensome paperwork affects attitudes and buy-in. It also puts undue stress on time resources and takes away from the teachers’ ability to deliver quality intervention in a timely manner.

PBIS Barriers

Like RTI, barriers are also present to the successful implementation of a PBIS program in schools. Studies indicate that strong leadership is required for the program to be successful (Bradshaw et al., 2008). In addition, training and teacher buy-in are also crucial for successful implementation. Kincaid, Child, Blase, and Wallace (2007) conducted a study on barriers and facilitators to successful implementation of school-wide PBIS. Their study also identified themes to barriers. These themes included staff buy-in, resources, and leadership. In addition, Pinkelman, McIntosh, Rasplica, Berg, and Strickland-Cohen (2015) cite lack of leadership and competing priorities as barriers to the successful implementation of PBIS.

Lack of Leadership or Staff Buy-In

In order for PBIS to be successful, it is essential that the school have strong leadership and teacher buy-in in place (Bradshaw et al., 2008). In their research on barriers to successful implementation, Kincaid et al. (2007) identified lack of administrator and teacher support as being particularly problematic to PBIS implementation and sustainability. In general, teachers who are not supportive of the initiative will fail to see the benefits and will ultimately compromise its successful implementation (Pinkelman et al., 2015). Furthermore, “passive resistance” from school administrators is also recognized as a major barrier to success, where passive resistance is defined as verbalizing support for the initiative but failing to learn more about it or implementing its core components (Forman, Olin, Hoagwood, Crowe, & Saka, 2009). Passive resistance among school leaders is seriously detrimental to the successful implementation of PBIS.

Resources

Resources can be identified as time, human resources, or financial resources. The lack of these resources can often have a negative impact on the successful implementation of PBIS. Furthermore, removal of the resources after implementation can result in serious problems for the sustainability and consistency of the program (Pinkelman et al., 2015).

Priorities

Similar to the leadership barrier, schools often have so many initiatives and school-improvement projects that often implementation of new initiatives suffer from competing priorities (Pinkelman et al., 2015). Testing and academic priorities are often the highest priority for teachers and administrators alike. Without proper instruction, the addition of PBIS seems to present a conflict to teachers as they perceive a new initiative as one that will distract from the main goal of student achievement. With proper instruction and training, teachers and administrators will come to understand that PBIS can have an overall positive effect on student academic achievement (PBIS-OSEP, 2016).

Program Evaluation Options

“Evaluation is not a new concept” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). In fact, there is evidence of program evaluation in the United States as early as the 1800s (Spaulding, 2014). In education, evaluations happen all the time. Teachers are evaluated by administrators to determine their effectiveness. Teachers evaluate their practice to improve on instructional delivery. In each instance, the evaluation is performed to judge the merit or worth of something (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Over the course of time, various approaches have been developed for formal program development. Some of the more popular evaluation models include Objectives-Oriented Evaluations, Participant-Oriented Evaluations, and Decision-Oriented Evaluations. Each

approach has its own inherent strengths and weaknesses. In order to select the appropriate approach, it is wise to have a general knowledge of the strengths and limitations of the various approaches to program evaluation.

Objectives-Oriented Evaluations

The objectives-oriented approach has historically been very popular. Beginning in the 1930s, evaluation in the United States was done extensively with this method. In education, the approach has influenced various educational objectives like criterion-referenced testing in the 1960s and the standards-based movement of today. The idea behind an objectives based approach is that purposes of the program are identified and then evaluated. In fact, the key role of the evaluator in an objectives-oriented evaluation is to determine whether some or all of the program objectives are achieved. Then if it is determined that they are achieved, the next question is to determine how well the objectives were met.

The main appeal of this type of evaluation is its simplicity. This approach is straightforward and easy to understand and follow. It bases the evaluation on program objectives and judges effectiveness by how well these objectives are met. Thus the evaluation gains legitimacy as it holds the program accountable for what its designers said it was going to accomplish in the first place (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

At first glance, an objectives-oriented approach has many positive attributes. However, there are also many drawbacks (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). An objectives-oriented approach can often be too focused on objectives. This can cause the evaluator to ignore other important aspects of the program that aren't necessarily related to the objectives under review. By ignoring the big picture, the evaluation of the program is at risk of being incomplete. In addition, the objectives-oriented approach typically ignores the context of the program. This affects the evaluator's

ability to gain a true sense of the program and, again, leaves the final evaluation woefully incomplete. These weaknesses of the objectives-based approach must be carefully considered when selecting an evaluation approach. The evaluator should not be purely drawn by the simplicity of the process.

Participant-Oriented Evaluations

As the name suggests, participant-oriented approaches to program evaluation involve participants of the program. When people think of program evaluation, they often think the evaluator is in charge. However, when an evaluator takes the participant-oriented approach, the perspectives and experiences of the stakeholders are the center-piece of the evaluation (Spaulding, 2014). In so doing, the evaluator is often able to gain a clearer understanding of the program and its worth by consulting with individuals who are intimately connected to the program. Therefore, including stakeholders in the evaluation can result in more valid data. This is possible because stakeholders have knowledge and perspectives that evaluators do not have (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Furthermore, involving the stakeholders in the evaluation process helps to build buy-in among the stakeholders. This, in turn, helps the stakeholders to gain trust in the evaluation, begin to understand it, and begin to think of ways that the evaluation might be used (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

The participatory approach is not without its limitations. In fact, Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) categorizes drawbacks of the participatory approach into two broad areas: (1) The feasibility of implementing a participatory study with any measureable success, and (2) the credibility of the results to those who may not participate in the evaluation. Feasibility is a real concern because achieving widespread stakeholder participation is not an easy task. Many evaluators who

undertake a participatory approach report that increased time and costs are drawbacks that must be taken into account when considering the feasibility of this approach (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). The other main category of limitations according to Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) deals with the credibility of the results to those who do not participate in the study. Due to the intimate connection between stakeholders and the program being evaluated, there is a tremendous potential for bias which can skew the results of the study. In short, it is often difficult to objectively judge one's own work (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

Decision-Oriented Evaluations

Decision-oriented approaches to evaluations were first developed in the 1970s to address the problem of evaluation results being ignored and having no impact (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). During this time, the results of various evaluations were not having any real impact on program improvement. They basically had become an academic exercise rather than a useful tool for improvement. Decision-oriented evaluations were developed to assist decision makers.

One of the major types of decision-oriented evaluations is the CIPP model. Developed by Daniel Stufflebeam in the 1970s; it was originally developed as an evaluation to be used in educational settings (Spaulding, 2014). CIPP is an acronym that stands for Context Evaluation, Input Evaluation, Process Evaluation, and Product Evaluation. These are the four steps or components that guide the evaluation process.

The first component of the CIPP model is the context evaluation. In this area, the evaluator studies the context in which the program being evaluated takes place. Spaulding (2014) explains that context in the CIPP model is understood as the scope of the problem in relation to the setting. If the purpose of a *program* is to solve a *problem*, then it is important to understand the context of the problem being addressed by the program. While different settings may have

similar issues, individuals within these settings may go about addressing the issues differently. Therefore, understanding the problem from the perspective of multiple stakeholders is referred to as establishing the context (Spaulding, 2014).

Input evaluation is the second component of CIPP. This component focuses on resources that are available for the program (Spaulding, 2014). These may include financial resources, staff, equipment, or other items needed for the program's success. Input evaluation gives decision makers crucial data for program planning and improvement.

The third component of CIPP is Process Evaluation. This component answers the question, "Is the program being implemented as planned?" (Spaulding, 2014). During this stage of the evaluation, data is collected to determine if the program is following the steps and procedures that were established at the outset of the program. This stage of the evaluation is extremely formative in nature. It provides important information to program directors regarding program implementation.

Product evaluation is the final component of the CIPP model. This stage is extremely summative in nature. The focus of this stage is on final outcomes and determining whether or not the program met its stated goals and objectives (Spaulding, 2014). The major question answered by this component is, "Was the program a success?"

Strengths of the CIPP Model

The main strength of this type of evaluation, and a major reason to select it for the evaluation of the program in Pamlico County is its ability to assist leaders in making decisions. Because the evaluation is extremely formative by design, there is no need to wait for a program to finish before evaluating its effectiveness. In this way decisions for improvement can be made. Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) state, ". . .examining issues concerning context, input, and process can

be helpful in identifying problems before they have grown and in suggesting solutions that will work better at achieving outcomes” (p. 178).

Weaknesses of the CIPP Model

The CIPP plan is not without criticism. One concern is that the approach is often too focused on decision-making, thereby giving too much power to program managers. In other words, the approach often has the tendency to neglect stakeholders who are not in a leadership or decision-making role (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Program evaluators must be deliberate in their actions so as to not give the impression that they are solely working for the management and program establishment (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Objectivity must be maintained at all times or the results of the evaluation may be perceived to be skewed even if there is no impropriety or bias. Furthermore, if the program leadership is not decisive or capable of making important decisions regarding the program, then the CIPP decision-making program evaluation is likely to not be effective (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe and discuss the procedures and methods that will be used to address the guiding questions related to the program evaluation of the MTSS process in the Pamlico County School District. These questions are not an exhaustive list of questions used in the actual program evaluation, but are intended to guide the evaluation to achieve a deeper and more thorough analysis of the MTSS program. These questions were developed following Stufflebeam's CIPP model and were focused around the four main types of evaluation contained in the model. This chapter also describes the participants and materials for this program evaluation and outlines the management plan for the conduction of the evaluation.

Guiding Questions for the Program Evaluation

Context Evaluation Questions

The first questions that must be addressed for this program evaluation deal with the context of the program. Context in the CIPP model is defined as the scope of the problem in relation to the setting and the stakeholders involved (Spaulding, 2014). Therefore, it is prudent to begin the evaluation with a clear understanding of the district's expectations for the MTSS framework in each school. It is then essential to compare this expectation to the reality of teacher and administrative perceptions of MTSS. In this way, one can begin to understand the basis for any confusion that may exist with the program. Examples of questions that must be answered during the context evaluation include:

1. Why was MTSS implemented in Pamlico County?
2. Based on archival data such as End of Grade Test Scores or DIBELS assessment data, what were the issues that initially indicated a need for MTSS in Pamlico County.
3. When was the process implemented and by whom?

4. In which schools was the process implemented? How was this decision made?
5. What are the district's expectations or requirements for MTSS?
6. Who sets these expectations and makes sure that the process is implemented with fidelity?
7. What are the district leaders' perceptions of MTSS and its relevance to the mission of the school district?
8. What are the building-level leadership's perceptions of MTSS and its relevance to the mission of the school district?
9. What are the principal's expectations for implementation?
10. What are the teachers' perceptions of MTSS?
11. Do teachers understand the district and school expectations?

Input Evaluation Questions

The next questions that must be addressed are aligned with the second part of Stufflebeam's CIPP model. These questions pertain to an input evaluation, and seek to determine if the available resources are sufficient for the program's proposed activities (Spaulding, 2014).

1. What type of training has been provided to teachers for implementation of MTSS?
2. What type of training has been provided for administrators for the implementation and maintenance of a successful MTSS program?
3. How often is training provided?
4. How are teachers new to the system trained?
5. Who is responsible for training teachers?
6. Is funding available for continuous or follow-up training?
7. What types of interventions are available for use?

8. How much funding is budgeted for interventions each year?
9. How are interventions chosen?

Process Evaluation Questions

Process evaluation questions seek to answer the question, “Is the program being done as planned?” This stage of the evaluation actually looks at the process and determines whether or not it is being implemented correctly. Some of the questions that will guide the process evaluation will include:

1. What kind of universal screener is used? How often are these screeners administered?
2. What does instruction look like in the classrooms?
3. How is core instruction differentiated in each classroom?
4. How are Tier 2 interventions delivered?
5. How are Tier 3 interventions delivered?
6. How are interventions designed or selected for students who struggle?
7. How is progress monitored and reported regarding the effectiveness of an intervention?
8. Does the master schedule accommodate intervention time during the school day?
9. Who provides the interventions for the students?
10. How are parents informed?
11. What is the process for referring students for Special Education Services from the MTSS process?
12. How are PBIS and behavioral supports incorporated into the MTSS framework?
13. What behavioral interventions are used?

14. What documentation requirements are in place?

15. Who is responsible for making sure the district and school policies are followed?

Product Evaluation Questions

The fourth and final area of the program evaluation involves the product. Product evaluation focuses on the final product and ultimately determines if the program has met its goals and objectives (Spaulding, 2014). This is a far more summative process than the previous three evaluation components that are highly formative in nature. Some of the product evaluation questions that must be answered include:

1. What percentage of students is considered proficient by the universal screeners?
2. How many students receive interventions at the Tier 2 level?
3. How many students receive interventions at the Tier 3 level?
4. Does progress monitoring data indicate effectiveness of selected interventions?
5. How many office discipline referrals are made each month?
6. How many students are suspended from school each month?
7. How many students demonstrate college and career readiness on End of Grade assessments?
8. How many students are considered grade level proficient on End of Grade assessments?
9. How many students are considered to be reading on grade level by DIBELS and mClass?

Participants

There are two schools in the Pamlico County School District that will be the main focus of the MTSS Program Evaluation. Pamlico County Primary School serves students in grades PK-

2nd Grade. Fred A. Anderson Elementary School serves students in grades 3rd through 5th grade. All of the classroom teachers at these schools will be asked to participate in a survey to better understand their perceptions of MTSS in Pamlico County, to include perceived successes and/or barriers to success. This survey will be used extensively for the context and input portions of the evaluation. Teachers will also be asked to participate in focus group interviews that will be designed to gain insight into teacher thoughts on the actual process of teaching and learning in Pamlico County schools within the framework of the MTSS program. In addition to the classroom teachers, we will also ask for participation from the school reading specialist and the Exceptional Children's teachers in both the survey and interviews. Finally, school and district-level administrators will also be asked to participate in the evaluation process through surveys and follow-up interviews. It is important to note that all participation in this study will be completely voluntary and that the identity of all participants will be kept confidential.

Materials

In each evaluation, these questions will be answered using a combination of online surveys and interviews. Surveys will be created using SurveyMonkey and will be shared with teachers at Pamlico County Primary School and Fred A. Anderson Elementary School. Specifically, each teacher in grades kindergarten through fifth grade will be asked to complete these surveys for both the context and input portions of the program evaluation. Similarly, school and district level administrators will complete surveys to ascertain their perceptions of MTSS in Pamlico County. SurveyMonkey is the preferred application for the survey. This product may be delivered online and has an established reputation for effective data collection in a secure environment. The online platform will also make data collection simple and efficient, all while maintaining confidentiality of the participant. Informed consent is critical in this process and a

consent form will be included with the survey (see Appendix A). In addition to the online surveys and focus group interviews, archival data such as mClass assessment data and End of Grade assessment data will also be scrutinized to determine the general effectiveness of the MTSS product. Finally, school and district level administrators will be interviewed to further gauge the perceptions of leadership in the MTSS process.

Management Plan

The overall plan for this program evaluation involves the utilization of Stufflebeam's CIPP model and will involve an in-depth look at the Context, Input, Process, and Product of the MTSS instructional framework of Pamlico County Schools. A combination of surveys and face-to-face interviews will be used to gather information within each of the evaluation areas. From these evaluation activities, data will be collected and analyzed to identify themes or trends. Recommendations based upon the data will be developed and communicated to the district leadership.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Multi-Tiered System of Support in the Pamlico County School District. This evaluation was specifically designed to assess the effectiveness of the MTSS process in relation to reading proficiency in grades K-5. The evaluation process selected was Stufflebeam's CIPP model that utilizes a four-component evaluation system that considers Context, Input, Process, and Product Evaluations of the MTSS process. This chapter presents the data that were gathered during the evaluation of each of these components through interviews and online surveys of district and school administrators as well as classroom teachers.

Context Evaluation

Context is the first component of the CIPP model for program evaluation. In order to effectively evaluate the MTSS process, it is important to have a clear understanding of the rationale for the implementation of MTSS. In addition, it is quite important to understand administrative and teacher perceptions of the process, its strengths, and its weaknesses. To conduct a Context Evaluation, the evaluator conducted interviews with district and building-level leadership. The following guiding questions were used in the context evaluation:

1. Why was MTSS implemented in Pamlico County?
2. Based on archival data such as End of Grade Test Scores or DIBELS assessment data, what were the issues that initially indicated a need for MTSS in Pamlico County.
3. When was the process implemented and by whom?
4. In which schools was the process implemented? How was this decision made?
5. What are the district's expectations or requirements for MTSS?

6. Who sets these expectations and makes sure that the process is implemented with fidelity?
7. What are the district leaders' perceptions of MTSS and its relevance to the mission of the school district?
8. What are the building-level leadership's perceptions of MTSS and its relevance to the mission of the school district?
9. What are the principal's expectations for implementation?
10. What are the teachers' perceptions of MTSS?
11. Do teachers understand the district and school expectations?

The majority of the answers for the context evaluation were gathered through an interview with the Executive Director of Instructional Services for Pamlico County Schools (S. Meador, personal communication, October 12, 2017). The director has worked for the school district as a teacher, principal, and district-level administrator for the past twenty years. She is intimately familiar with the district's decision-making process and was an excellent resource for the context evaluation. Using the guiding questions for this evaluation, the evaluator discussed the rationale for implementing MTSS in Pamlico County Schools. According to the director, the process has evolved over the past six years. It was initially implemented because test scores, specifically at the elementary level were *not moving*. The schools were consistently low-performing and had actually been classified as a School of Improvement by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. This designation indicated that the school was identified by the state as a low-performing school and had to implement specific remediation plans for students. At this point in time, the process was not known as MTSS, but utilized a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) system for all students. In 2013, the state endorsed a move from PEPs to Response to

Intervention (RTI) and required school districts to send teams of educators to be trained. During the 2013-14 school year, Pamlico County Schools made the transition from PEPs to RTI, which is a pre-cursor to the MTSS process of today.

The Director indicated that Pamlico County Primary School and Fred A. Anderson Elementary School were chosen to implement the PEP/RTI/MTSS process. This decision was made due to the nature of the curriculum at the primary and elementary levels. These schools focus on foundational skills, where students are just learning to read. It was reasoned that if learning gaps could be more easily addressed and filled at these schools, then the implementation at the upper grades might not be necessary. In addition, personnel dictated the decision in many ways. At the time, teacher assistants were assigned to each class at the primary and elementary levels. This additional staff could be used to provide the instruction and intervention that is needed in the RTI model. The middle and high school classrooms did not have access to these additional support staff members, so from a personnel standpoint, RTI/MTSS implementation at the primary and elementary levels was the logical choice.

The interview with the Executive Director for Instructional Services continued to discuss the expectations for MTSS on the district level. According to the director, the district does not currently have a written plan for MTSS, so there are no published or district-wide expectations for the process. The Director concluded that this lack of vision at the district-level can be attributed to the extremely high level of turnover in district and school-level leadership over the past six years. When RTI/MTSS was first implemented in 2013, a former superintendent was running the district and any new initiatives for the district were set forth from the central office. The former Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction was responsible for the initial implementation of the PEP system. When the transition from PEP to RTI was made, the

responsibility of oversight was given to the director of the Exceptional Children's program as RTI was widely viewed as a means to identify children with special learning needs. The NC Department of Public Instruction later further clarified the purpose of RTI/MTSS which then prompted a move back to curriculum and instruction. During this transition, Pamlico County Schools had a Director of Student Services. Being viewed as a student service, MTSS was then assigned to this director. The following year, a new superintendent was appointed by the Board of Education and there was major realignment in leadership, at the district and school levels. New directors were put in place and each school received a new principal. At this point, leadership for MTSS was placed at the school level, and the district took a more hands-off approach. Currently, the school psychologist for the district has taken on the role of MTSS Coordinator for the district, but there are really no new district directives. District-level oversight of MTSS is non-existent. Individual schools have been given the responsibility of implementation and maintenance of the program.

The Director expressed a strong belief in the relevance for the MTSS instructional framework. She believes that the implementation was poorly executed and that the turnover in the district exacerbated the problem. She furthermore stated that she feels that Pamlico County Schools are finally moving in the right direction with MTSS, but was concerned that there is still not at cohesive vision for MTSS in the district.

The principals of Pamlico County Primary School and Fred A. Anderson Elementary School were also interviewed to determine their perceptions of MTSS at their respective schools. The principal of Pamlico County Primary School has completed two full years in the position. She is the third principal in the past six years and found that when she came to the school there was a strong disconnect between the leadership's expectations for MTSS and the staff's

perceptions of the program (C. Dixon, personal communication, December 15, 2017). The principal's perception of MTSS at the Pamlico County Primary School is that MTSS has become a very negative process in the eyes of the teachers. They have recently started referring to the program as *student support* and the change has been well-received. The principal believes that the staff has become so disenchanted with the process that a stigma has been created that is difficult to overcome. Many teachers at the school view MTSS as simply a means to qualify students for exceptional children's services. The principal sees the relevance in the program and feels that it is important to put the framework in place so that individual students can have their unique needs met. She has strategically changed the name of the process at her school in an effort to change the perception. Since its inception at PCPS, teachers had been required to create data folders for each student who failed to meet grade-level expectations on screeners and benchmark assessments. This created an inordinate amount of paperwork that really overwhelmed the staff and created a negative impression of MTSS. In an effort to change attitudes and relieve burdensome paperwork, they have taken the approach of completely adopting their own system. The system is essentially the MTSS framework known by a different name. According to the principal, it is an attempt to reinvent the process and implement it in a way that should have been done in the first place.

The Primary School's principal has multi-faceted expectations for MTSS. First, she feels that it is important that Tier 1, or core instruction, is as effective as possible. She assumes the responsibility to make sure that the Tier 1 instruction meets her expectations and works with teachers to improve instruction for all students. Another expectation is that all decisions regarding interventions and Tier 2 supports are based upon data. She feels that if this is done, MTSS will prove to be an effective framework for instruction at her school.

The principal at Fred A. Anderson Elementary School is in her first year in this position. She is the fourth principal in six years at the school. She was also interviewed to determine her perceptions of MTSS and its relevance to the mission of the school district. She believes that MTSS, when implemented with fidelity, can provide an opportunity to meet the needs of students academically and behaviorally within the regular education classroom (T. Bennett, personal communication, December 17, 2017). She feels that the process is quite relevant to the mission of the school district and that when the process is ultimately implemented as it should be, then students will realize more success and become productive and responsible citizens. She currently believes that the process is not being implemented at full capacity in her school. She feels that this can be attributed to the general lack of understanding of MTSS among the teaching staff at her school.

The principal at Fred A. Anderson Elementary also has several expectations for MTSS. First she wants her teachers to begin to understand the MTSS framework better. She strongly promotes the use of data in instructional decision making. She expects teachers to use data to reshape how Tier 1 instruction is delivered. Ultimately, she believes that the effectiveness of MTSS at her school is dependent on how well instruction is implemented at the K-2 level.

All teachers at Pamlico County Primary School and Fred A. Anderson Elementary School were asked to participate in a survey on MTSS for this program evaluation. In addition, a focus group of teachers were interviewed to gain insight on teacher beliefs about MTSS in Pamlico County Schools. In both the survey and the interview, teachers were asked about their perceptions of MTSS, how well they understood the process, and how well they thought the process addressed the needs of students. Their responses indicate that many of the teachers are not very familiar with the process at all, although they are expected to utilize the process to help

students achieve their goals in reading. Figure 2 illustrates this point, as the majority of respondents only claim to be somewhat familiar with MTSS.

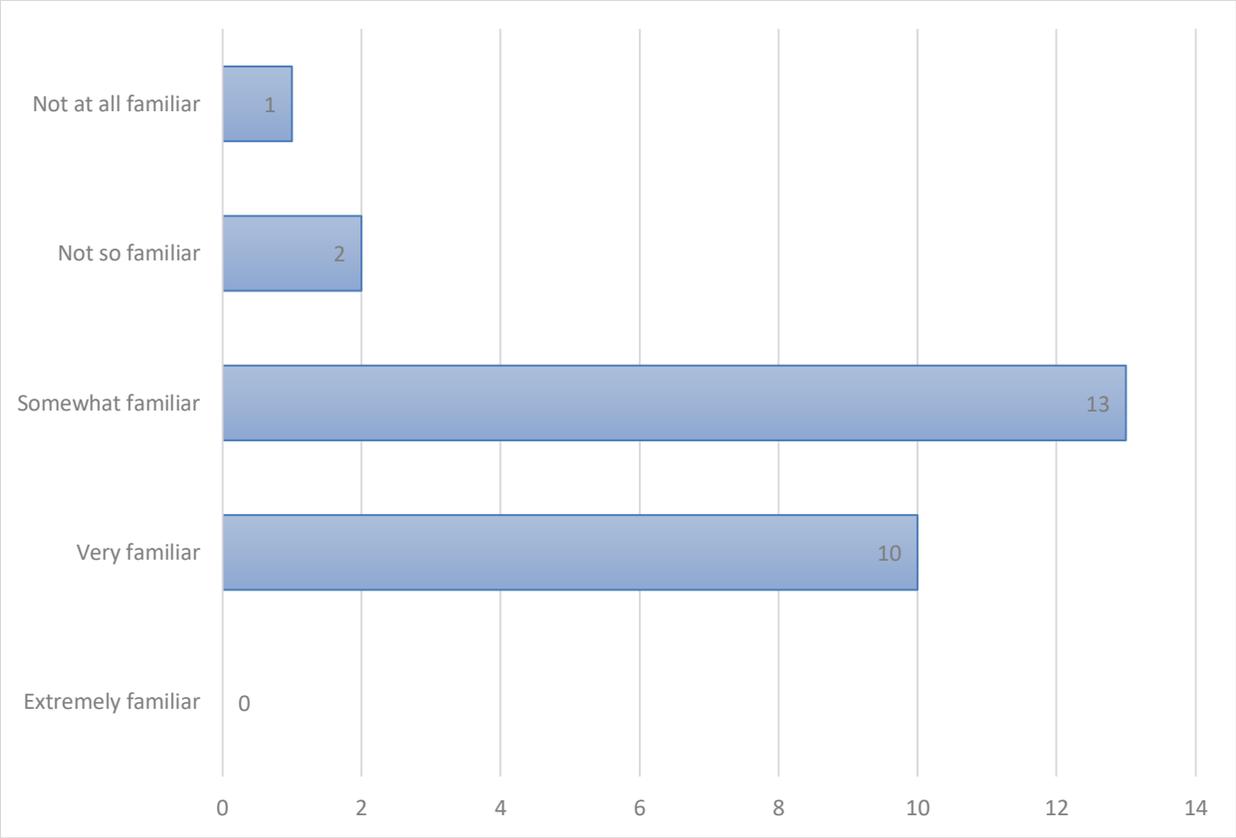
The survey also revealed a great deal of frustration from teachers with the MTSS process. In the MTSS survey, several teachers indicated that there is a general lack of understanding about expectations for the process. One teacher stated, “No one seems to know exactly what the process is and how it works. There has not been enough information or training.” Another teacher complained about a “lack of understanding expectations regarding MTSS. There has been no consistency in the process in terms of forms, a team, resources, or communication.” This sentiment was echoed in both the survey and the focus group interview.

Figure 3 illustrates the fact that the majority of the staff does not believe that MTSS is an effective process for helping students. In the survey, 72% of respondents believe that MTSS in Pamlico County Schools has made little impact on student achievement in reading. Teachers do not believe in the program, nor do they believe that it is effective in improving student achievement.

Input Evaluation

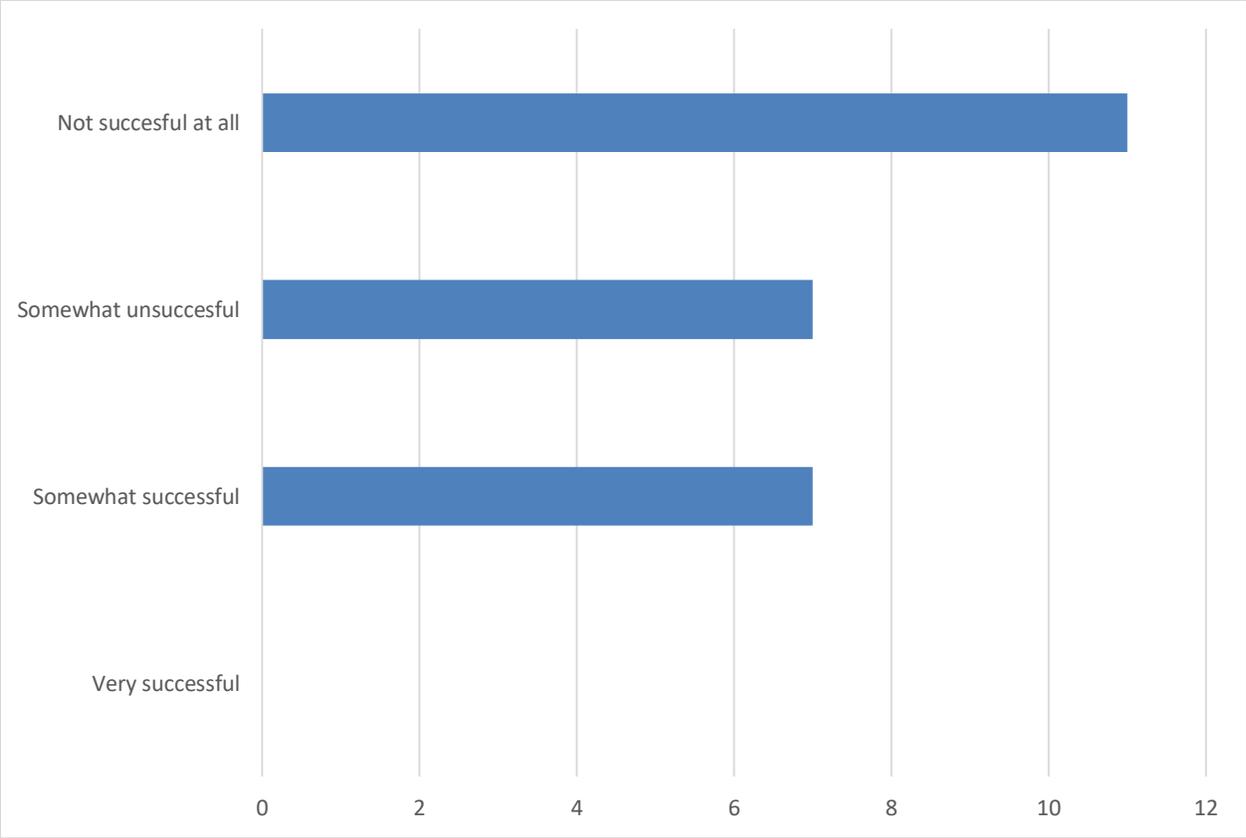
Input evaluation is the second step of the program evaluation using the CIPP model. In this component, resources are assessed to see if they are making an impact on the program. The guiding questions that were used to direct the input evaluation are as follows:

1. What type of training has been provided to teachers for implementation of MTSS?
2. What type of training has been provided for administrators for the implementation and maintenance of a successful MTSS program?
3. How often is training provided?
4. How are teachers new to the system trained?



Note. Teachers were asked to rate their familiarity with the MTSS process. Twenty-six individuals responded to this survey question.

Figure 2. Teacher familiarity with MTSS.



Note. Teachers were asked the question, “How successful do you think MTSS has been in improving student achievement.” Twenty-six individuals responded to this survey question.

Figure 3. Teacher perceptions of MTSS success.

5. Who is responsible for training teachers?
6. Is funding available for continuous or follow-up training?
7. What types of interventions are available for use?
8. How much funding is budgeted for interventions each year?
9. How are interventions chosen?

To determine the answers to these questions, interviews of the Executive Director of Instructional Services, principals, and teachers were conducted. In addition, teachers were surveyed to determine the types of training that they have had pertaining to MTSS. In this study, professional development and training are major resources that directly impact the effectiveness of the program. In the interview with the Instructional Services Director, training was discussed and it was determined that there has been no extensive training for administrators or teachers in a couple of years. There have been pockets of training for certain members of the district, especially instructional coaches and school-based administrators, but without a clear district leader, the information gained from the trainings have not gone back to the schools. According to the Director, turnover and transition at the district level have greatly contributed to this breakdown in scheduling and maintaining training for teachers. The principals agreed that there has not been much formal training specific to MTSS, although training in instructional delivery and core instructions strategies have taken place and are planned. Both principals indicated that MTSS needs to be part of the fabric of the school and that while training about MTSS itself has not taken place, professional development has been provided that directly impacts a teacher's ability to operate within the MTSS framework. For example, at Pamlico County Primary School there has been a major initiative in improving core reading instruction. A guided reading program has been implemented with the intention of strengthening core instruction, which is Tier

1 of MTSS. Due to confusion among teachers, they do not see this as MTSS training. No formal training regarding general MTSS processes has been conducted. The district has given the responsibility of planning and conducting staff development to the individual schools. If new teachers are hired, it is the principal's responsibility to implement staff development. Schools are given an annual professional development budget and principals are responsible for allocating funds for any training. Both Pamlico County Primary School and Fred A. Anderson Elementary School receive federal Title I funding which is used for professional development for teachers.

When teachers were asked about training, the overwhelming majority of teachers indicate that they have received little or no formal training in the process. Specifically, 42% of survey respondents indicated that they have received only a little training in MTSS, while 27% of respondents indicated that they have participated in no MTSS training at all.

Both principals indicated that intervention strategies and programs are selected using data analysis from common and benchmark assessments. Students in grades Kindergarten through 3rd grade are required to be assessed using Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Text Reading Comprehension (TRC). These assessments pinpoint weaknesses in skill development and reading interventions are planned to meet individual needs. Intervention programs have been purchased by using both school and district funds. These interventions include Hill RAP, Reading Eggs, and Edmentum Exact Path programs. Annual funding for intervention programs are budgeted each year.

Process Evaluation

The third component of the CIPP method of program evaluation is the process evaluation. In this step, actual process is scrutinized to determine if the process is being conducted as planned. In this particular evaluation, a great deal of attention is given to classroom instruction

and how it is delivered in grades k-5. The guiding questions regarding process included the following:

1. What kind of universal screener is used? How often are these screeners administered?
2. What does instruction look like in the classrooms?
3. How is core instruction differentiated in each classroom?
4. How are Tier 2 interventions delivered?
5. How are Tier 3 interventions delivered?
6. How are interventions designed or selected for students who struggle?
7. How is progress monitored and reported regarding the effectiveness of an intervention?
8. Does the master schedule accommodate intervention time during the school day?
9. Who provides the interventions for the students?
10. How are parents informed?
11. What is the process for referring students for Special Education Services from the MTSS process?
12. How are PBIS and behavioral supports incorporated into the MTSS framework?
13. What behavioral interventions are used?
14. What documentation requirements are in place?
15. Who is responsible for making sure the district and school policies are followed?

The process evaluation questions were largely posed to the two school principals, as they are the instructional leaders of their schools and set the tone for day to day instruction. This portion of the program evaluation focused on the general components of MTSS including

screeners and assessments, interventions, and documentation. According to both principals, the universal screener used at both schools is the state required DIBELS and TRC assessments. In addition, Edmentum Exact Path assessments are used in grades 4 – 5 as a screener for reading. These are given to all students during scheduled testing windows at beginning, middle, and end of the academic year. Based upon the results of the assessments, interventions are developed and delivered to students. Progress is monitored every ten to twenty days depending on the severity of the skill deficiency. This progress monitoring is intended to assess the effectiveness of the intervention and guide future instruction.

Both principals have really emphasized the importance of strengthening core instruction in all grades. When the principal of Pamlico County Primary School (PCPS) took over leadership at the school, she was given the directive to *fix reading* (C. Dixon, personal communication, December 15, 2017). According to the principal, she observed an immediate need to address the core instructional practices in each grade. One issue involved general instructional practices in reading, while another involved a lack of fidelity in the instructional delivery. She has worked with her staff to address these issues and feels that the implementation of guided reading in all grades has really improved the core instruction. Core is differentiated through the guided reading program. This program is leveled, meaning that it provides instruction based on the needs of the student, as it addresses individual reading levels.

The principal at Fred A. Anderson Elementary (FAA) has also identified a tremendous need to improve core instruction and this has been the emphasis at the school since she has been in the position (T. Bennett, personal communication, December 17, 2017). According to the principal, she believes that core instruction has not been meeting the needs of the students in the school and has begun discussions with teachers in the school. She thinks that a culture change is

necessary in the school so that teachers will see the need to adjust their instruction at the core or Tier 1 level to support students. These adaptations to instruction should be based on data collected from common assessments. The principal's current goals involve shifting the focus of the school from the idea that students have a problem learning, to understanding that there is a problem with instructional delivery that must be addressed. This is the current state of core instruction at FAA. Differentiation of the core instruction is important in accomplishing the principal's goals. The school is currently using Common Core Coach and StoryWorks curriculums that have differentiated lessons embedded in the programs. The teachers have also selected small groups for guided reading practice.

At both schools, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are delivered in small groups by all available staff members. Teachers, teacher assistants, and instructional specialists are all involved in providing intervention support. The master schedule at both schools have been adjusted to embed intervention periods within the school day. This is the time when students are pulled out of class and into small groups for the intervention. According to the principal at PCPS, the schedule was adjusted in the summer of 2017 specifically with interventions in mind. She wanted to design a schedule that would accommodate daily intervention time. This is "non-negotiable" time that is set aside for guided reading interventions. FAA also adjusted the schedule to add intervention times. The principal indicated that the schedule is still a work in progress and will be further modified in preparations for the 2018-19 school year. Currently, all grades at FAA do not receive equitable intervention time. 3rd and 4th grade have at least 30 minutes daily for intervention support, while 5th grade only has 20 – 25 minutes. All grades at PCPS have 45-minute intervention periods.

Interventions at both schools are designed and selected based on the assessment of data collected from common assessments. Intervention needs are identified based on the skill or standard that the student has not mastered. Interventions often involve small group instruction with the use of computer-aided instructional delivery. Teachers have a great deal of autonomy in the selection of intervention programs and are free to select the intervention program that they will use. However, it is expected and required that interventions be selected based upon research and discussion. According to one principal, there is a bit of trial and error with this approach, but she is pleased with the overall direction.

Parents are regularly sent progress reports to let them know about their child's progress. Students who have not met grade-level expectations for reading receive regular progress monitoring with their interventions. This data is collected and reported to parents. This is particularly important for students who may be struggling with the academic content based upon an underlying learning disability. The MTSS process is designed to provide documented evidence of these types of struggles. When interventions do not work, students may be referred for testing by the school psychologist to check for possible learning disabilities. This is why it is critical that selected interventions are research-based and are delivered with fidelity.

Behavioral interventions are an area of MTSS that has, to this point, been overlooked by the administration and staff at both schools. When asked about Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), both principals acknowledged that there has been little to no emphasis at the schools. The principal at FAA has recognized the need for PBIS at the school and has begun to lay a foundation for behavioral supports. *Skill Groups*, focusing on character skills have been incorporated into the weekly routine at FAA. These groups are working on character education and the importance of building positive relationships. The school leadership team is currently

exploring the possibility of adding a character education curriculum school-wide for the 2018-19 school year. At this point, however, the behavioral side of MTSS has not been addressed to any great extent at either school.

Documentation requirements for MTSS in Pamlico County have historically been a lengthy process. In years past, any student receiving interventions of any kind had to have a formal record file. This paperwork has been one of the most frustrating parts of the process for teachers, which has largely been eliminated in the primary school's new approach to MTSS. Teachers must still maintain progress monitoring records for interventions, but the laborious and time-consuming documentation process has been eliminated. At Fred A. Anderson Elementary, many of the documentation requirements have also been suspended and/or changed. The teachers now use a Data Planning Sheet to analyze student assessment data and plan interventions. In addition, teachers will use these forms as a means to monitor student progress.

Both school principals have taken the lead in making sure that a MTSS framework is in place in their respective schools. Without district oversight, they have been left to make their own decisions and mold the process as they see fit. They are responsible for holding teachers accountable for their instructional practices and interventions that might be needed to support students.

Product Evaluation

The fourth and final component of the CIPP approach to program evaluation is the product evaluation. In this component, final outcomes are evaluated in an effort to determine if the program is meeting its objectives. The guiding questions used for the product evaluation included:

1. What percentage of students is considered proficient by the universal screeners?

2. How many students receive interventions at the Tier 2 level?
3. How many students receive interventions at the Tier 3 level?
4. Does progress monitoring data indicate effectiveness of selected interventions?
5. How many office discipline referrals are made each month?
6. How many students are suspended from school each month?
7. How many students demonstrate college and career readiness on End of Grade assessments?
8. How many students are considered grade level proficient on End of Grade assessments?
9. How many students are considered to be reading on grade level by DIBELS and mClass?

In this study, archival data was evaluated to determine the impact of MTSS on student achievement in reading. Principals were also interviewed to gather any other information relevant to the product evaluation. Universal screeners are given at the beginning of each school year. Follow-up assessments are given in the middle and end of year to track student progress. On the initial DIBELS/TRC assessment in 2017, students in grades K-2 were 43% proficient, meaning that 43% of students met grade-level expectations for the assessment. This is up from 33% in 2016. At FAA, 49% of students in grade 3 were considered proficient using the DIBELS/TRC assessment.

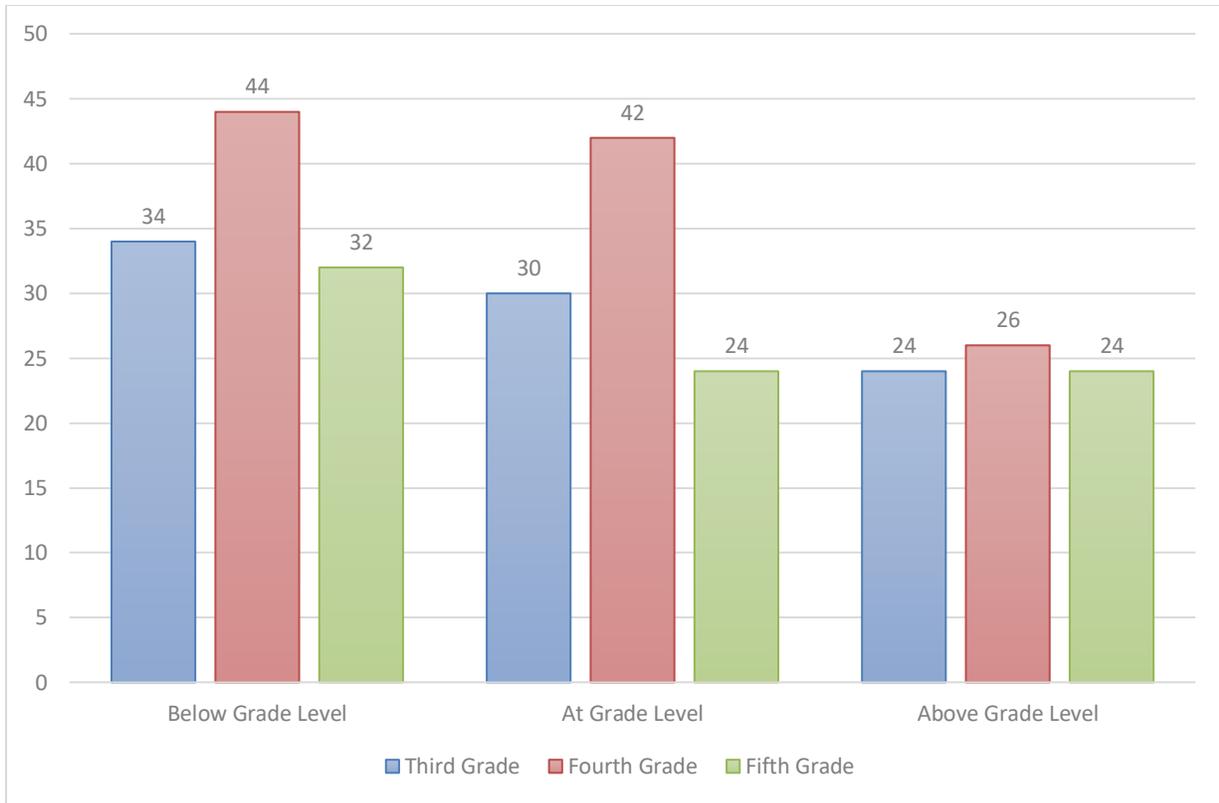
The students were also assessed with the Edmentum Exact path assessment. On this assessment 60% of students were considered to be at or above grade-level. The main difference in these assessments is that the Edmentum assessment is a multiple choice test, whereas the Text Reading Comprehension (TRC) assessment tests students through open response questions

requiring students to write their answers. The results of the Edmentum Diagnostic Assessment for Grades 3 – 5 are illustrated in Figure 4.

When examining interventions, the number of students receiving Tier 2 & 3 interventions at PCPS is difficult to determine. The number of students receiving Tier 2 interventions fluctuate under the new system that the principal has put in place. In years past, once students received Tier 2 interventions, they were considered to be *in Tier 2* and documentation was kept to record their activities. The new approach at PCPS makes it possible for students to receive Tier 2 interventions for only as long as they are needed. So the principal could not say with a great deal of accuracy how many students were receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports at any given time. Fred A. Anderson is still following the more traditional Pamlico County approach in keeping track of how many students are in Tier 2 or Tier 3. The principal reported that 70 students in the school receive Tier 2 interventions weekly. There are 37 students in grades 3-5 who receive Tier 3 interventions.

Progress monitoring data indicates that selected interventions are effective in helping students improve their reading skills. The principals stated that this was true at both schools. The principal at PCPS emphasized that data is continuously analyzed to determine the effectiveness of interventions and next steps for students. The principal at FAA echoed these sentiments. She also made a point to explain that while interventions seem effective based on progress monitoring data, they will be validated once students take the middle-of-year assessment. A concern of the principal is that students have historically performed well based on progress monitoring data, but fall short of expectations when taking the formal assessments.

Discipline records reveal many behavioral challenges in Pamlico County Schools, particularly at the elementary level. During the 2017-18 school year, at Pamlico County Primary



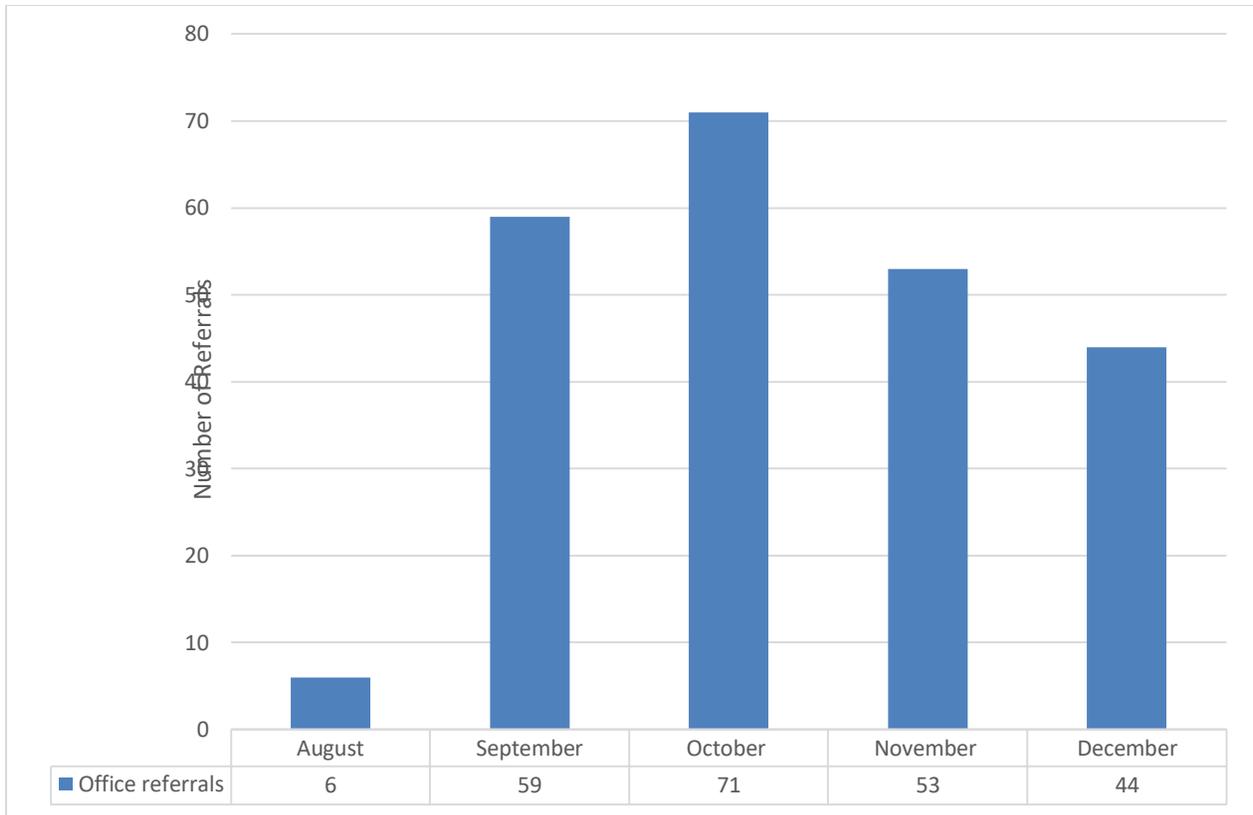
Note. A new universal screener, *Edmentum Exact Path*, was implemented in Grades 3 – 5 during the fall of 2017. This screener is an online diagnostic tool that determines grade-level proficiency in reading. The results in Figure 4 represent the percentage of student in each grade who are considered to be below grade-level, at grade-level, and above grade-level based upon the beginning-of-year assessment.

Figure 4. Edmentum Screener results.

School, there is an average of seven disciplinary referrals per month. From these referrals, an average of four students are suspended per month. PCPS currently does not use In-School Suspension. In contrast, Fred A. Anderson Elementary School shows a tremendous increase in the number of office district referrals. During the fall of 2017, September through December, FAA averaged nearly 57 office referrals per month. Figure 5 provides specific information regarding the number of office discipline referrals per month at FAA.

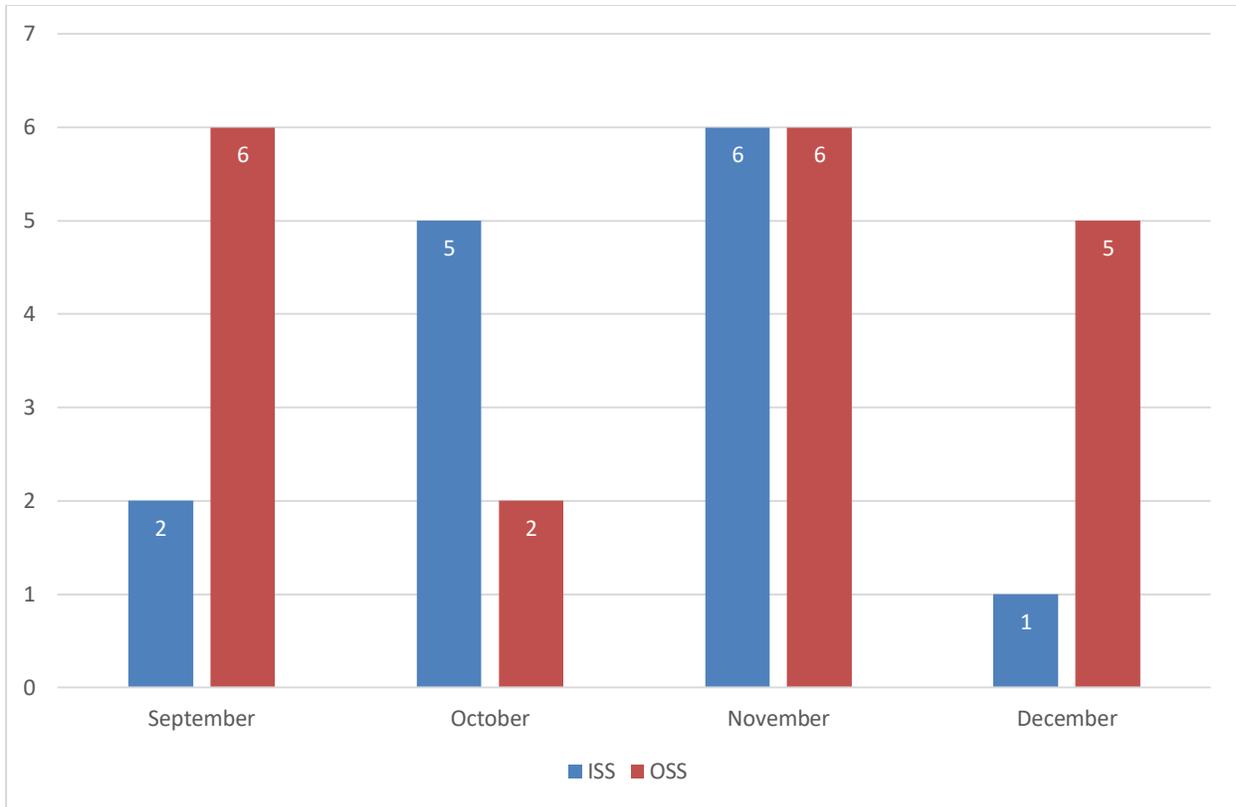
During the same time frame, there was an average of four assignments per month to In-School Suspension and five Out-of-School Suspensions as a result of the office discipline referrals. FAA averages just under ten suspensions (ISS & OSS) per month. Figure 6 provides more detailed information regarding disciplinary measures at FAA.

The End of Grade Assessments in reading begin in Grade 3 and continue on until Grade 8. These assessments are the standard by which instructional effectiveness is measured. They are also a center-piece of the product evaluation as overall effectiveness of the MTSS process in Pamlico County Schools can be measured by student performance on these tests. Students take the assessments during the last ten days of the academic year. Examining the data, it may be observed that there is a distinct downward trend in performance on the EOG assessments. A large percentage of students in the district have demonstrated significant difficulties in reading, based upon their performance on the EOG assessments. Examination of EOG scores over the past four years reveals that average scores in each grade continue to decline. On the most recent EOG assessments in 2017, 48% of third grade students were considered to be Grade Level Proficient (GLP). GLP results for students in fourth grade were 38% proficient while fifth grade students were 51% proficient. The state also measures whether students are on track to be *college and career ready*. Based on this standard, only 35% of third grade students are considered ready.



Note. Summary of the number of office discipline referrals at Fred A. Anderson Elementary School in the fall of 2017.

Figure 5. Office discipline referrals.

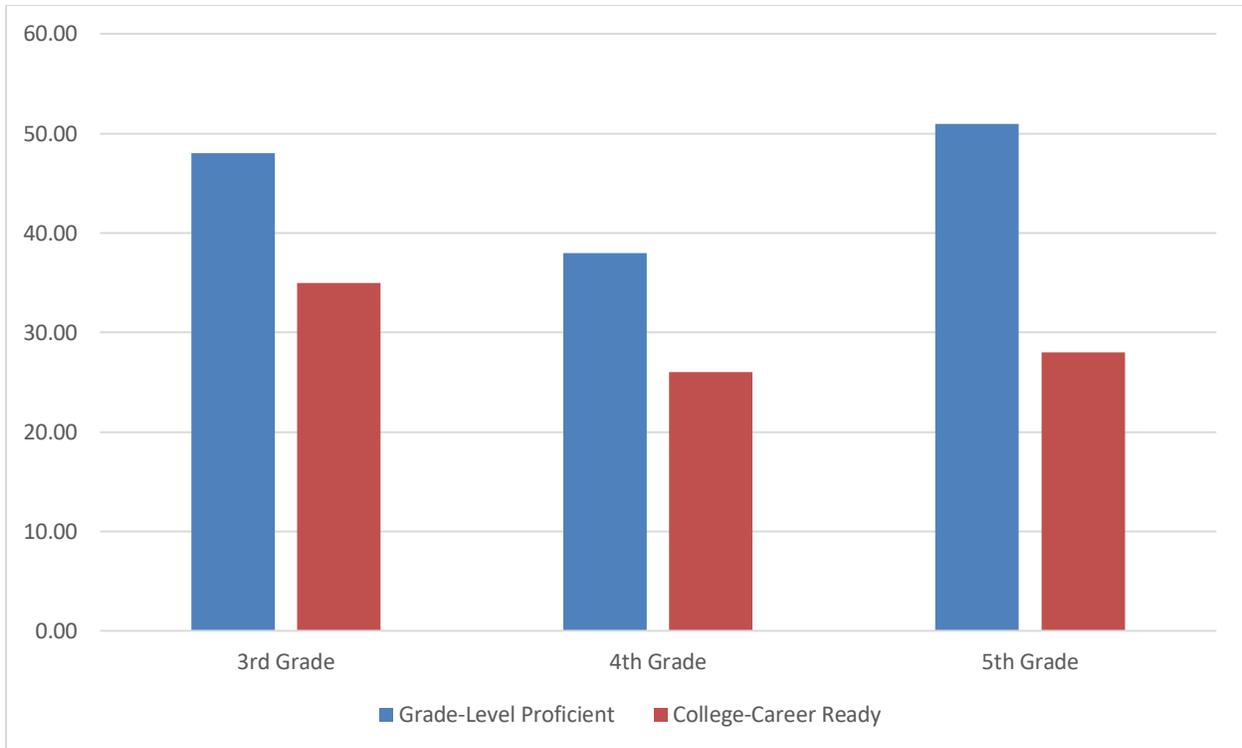


Note. Summary of the number and types of suspensions per month at Fred A. Anderson Elementary School in the fall of 2017.

Figure 6. Suspensions at Fred A. Anderson – fall 2017.

26% of fourth grade students were considered college and career ready based on this standard, while 28% of fifth graders met the standard. Overall, the overwhelming majority of students in Pamlico County Schools continue to struggle to meet grade-level and college/career expectations in reading. Figure 7 illustrates the results of End of Grade assessments at FAA in 2017.

End of Grade Assessments are not the only reading tests that indicate challenges for Pamlico County Schools. Using state-mandated assessments in DIBELS/TRC, students in grades kindergarten through third grade are tested to determine their proficiency in reading. Text Reading Comprehension is a component of the assessment that measures a student's ability to comprehend what they read. Each grade has specific TRC standards or expectations. For 2016-17 school year, 46% of students at PCPS were considered grade-level proficient. This was up from 33% in the 2015-16 school year. The majority of students at Fred A. Anderson Elementary School also demonstrated weakness in TRC as only 37% of students in grade 3 were considered to be *on grade-level*.



Note. 2017 Results for End of Grade Assessments at Fred A. Anderson Elementary School. The figure shows the percentage of students, by grade level, who were considered proficient and college-career ready.

Figure 7. EOG Results for reading – 2017.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS) program of Pamlico County Schools to determine its capacity to positively impact reading proficiency in students. For the past several years, students in Pamlico County have consistently struggled in reading, which is clearly illustrated by repeated poor performance on End-of-Grade Assessments. Due to the historically poor results on these assessments, MTSS was implemented in the district as a means of addressing the problem. However, since its inception, the MTSS process has failed to have meaningful impact on reading proficiency as a majority of students continue to perform below grade level. It was determined that a program evaluation would be beneficial to gauge the effectiveness of the process and give direction to the district for MTSS improvement. The goal of this study was to inform decision makers about the strengths and weaknesses of the program and to produce recommendations for improvement.

In order to make sound decisions regarding the MTSS program, a decision-oriented evaluation approach was selected. The specific evaluation followed by this study was the CIPP model. This model is actually four evaluations in one, as Context, Input, Process, and Product Evaluations are all considered. In looking at the results of each evaluation, the bigger picture of the state of MTSS becomes more clear, and overall decisions can be made to improve MTSS in the future.

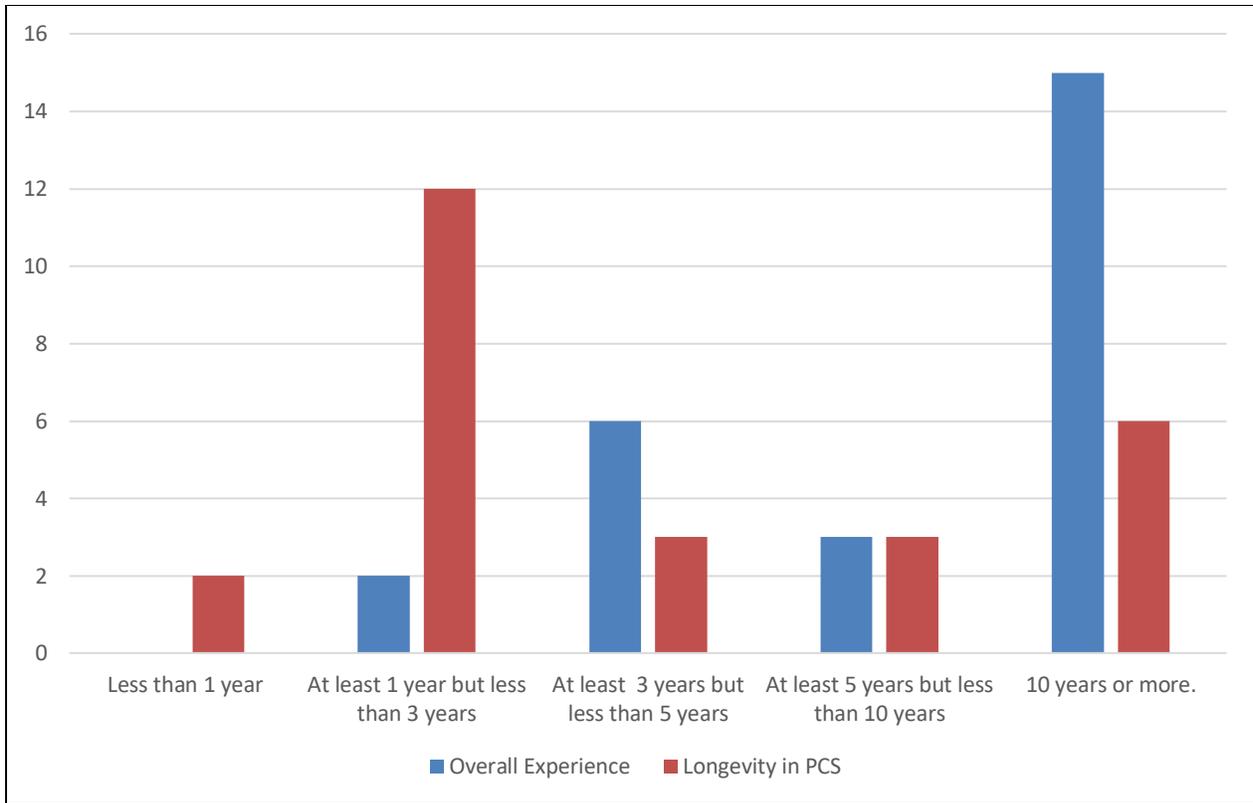
Context Evaluation Discussion

The context evaluation proved to be a major component of the overall program evaluation. Interviews with the Executive Director for Instructional Services and the principals of Pamlico County Primary School and Fred A. Anderson Elementary School were the primary

sources of information for this evaluation. It became glaringly apparent during the course of the interviews that there is no real vision for MTSS in Pamlico County Schools. The process was implemented in the district to address poor test scores, but was done so with little direction. Staff turnover at all levels has been a major contributor to this dysfunction. Currently there is no district-level direction for the schools and they are left to their own devices and ideas. Without district leadership, there is no cohesive vision. Each principal stated that they really did not understand the district expectations for MTSS, but are attempting to press forward and create a framework for MTSS at their respective schools.

Like the leadership at the district level, school-based leadership has also seen its share of turnover over the course of the past six years. Pamlico County Primary School has had three principals in six years, while Fred A. Anderson Elementary School has had four. This turnover has contributed to confusion and a lack of vision for MTSS in the district. Interviews with the principals of the primary and elementary school were conducted and reveal that there is a better understanding of the purpose of MTSS in the schools now, but the fact remains that there is no clear understanding of district expectations. School-level expectations are not consistent between the two campuses. While the principals do see MTSS as a means by which students can qualify for EC services, there is also understanding that the process is much more than an identification instrument for EC. The challenge now is to develop a cohesive vision for MTSS in the schools between administration and teachers.

Survey results show that teacher turnover is also a challenge for the Pamlico County School District. Figure 8 illustrates that while the majority of the teaching staff at both schools are experienced teachers, a large percentage of the staff members at both schools are relatively new to their positions.



Note. Overall Years of Experience vs. Longevity in the Pamlico County Schools (Grades K-5). This figure illustrates the years of educational experience of the teaching staff in grades K-5. It also illustrates the amount of time in years that teachers have been in their positions with Pamlico County Schools.

Figure 8. Teacher experience and longevity.

Most of the teachers in the district in grades K-5 are new to their positions. With this much turnover at every level, there is little wonder that the MTSS program has struggled to be implemented with fidelity.

Input Evaluation Discussion

An analysis of the evaluation data reveals that there has been little consistent input of resources for MTSS since the inception of the program. Administrators and teachers have indicated that there has been very little training on the program, which has led to a great deal of confusion and frustration. One teacher commented on the survey, “I don’t think we have been properly trained. You cannot effectively implement something that you have never been trained for.” This sentiment was echoed by colleagues and is the central theme of the input evaluation results. The district seems willing to allocate available funding for staff development, but without district-level guidance, there doesn’t seem to be any sort of plan. Principals and schools enjoy a tremendous amount of autonomy when it comes to selection of professional development activities. Principals are using data to select professional development activities. Both schools have placed an emphasis on training to strengthen core instruction, which certainly is a major component of MTSS. However, without a general training to explain the MTSS framework in detail, its components, and the expectations of the administration, confusion will most likely continue.

Process Evaluation Discussion

The actual process of delivering instruction and interventions using the MTSS process seems to be moving in a positive direction. Each principal has clearly made improving Tier 1 instruction a priority at each school. To improve instructional delivery to make it more effective and impactful is a positive first step in improving the overall quality of the MTSS framework.

Principals have worked hard to create a cultural shift in the schools where teachers are expected to reflect on their instruction and make instructional planning decisions based on data. There has been an increased emphasis on teachers working within a team or Professional Learning Community (PLC) to analyze data, make plans, and develop interventions for students.

Both principals have identified challenges with their school's master schedules and have taken steps to improve them by adding dedicated intervention time into the daily routine. The principal at FAA has conceded that the current schedule, is still not adequate despite attempts to add intervention time. She has expressed a desire to once again examine the schedule during the upcoming summer to further refine it in hopes of making it more effective.

One of the components of the program that has historically stirred negative emotions among teachers is the oppressive and laborious documentation requirements that have been in place since the inception of the program in Pamlico County. Efforts have been made to significantly lessen the paperwork requirements at both schools. While documentation needs can certainly never be completely eliminated, both principals have sought ways to streamline the documentation process and make it more efficient. This is a very positive development.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) is a major component of MTSS that has to this point been largely ignored in Pamlico County. This is a trend that must change. Behavioral supports are critical to helping many students succeed in school. So much focus has gone into the academic side of the framework that behavior and its connection to academic performance has been overlooked. Both principals are looking for ways to implement behavioral supports into their schools. At PCPS, a new record-keeping process is currently being sought to assist with behavioral data collection. This will help administrators identify trends in behaviors and provide support to both students and teachers.

MTSS at both Pamlico County Primary School and Fred A. Anderson Elementary School has gone through an evolution since the inception of the program. New principals have brought their own ideas and expectations to the program. The current principals are no exception and have a vision for MTSS in their respective schools. The principals consider themselves to be the instructional leaders of their schools and have set the tone for MTSS in the schools. Unfortunately, since no two individuals are the same, expectations at each school are not consistent. Without some district input on expectations for MTSS, this inconsistency will continue to exist, which presents a challenge as students transition from the primary school to the elementary school. Consistency in expectations for core instructional delivery and interventions would make the transition between schools more seamless.

Product Evaluation Discussion

The product or outcome of the MTSS framework is measured by student performance on End of Grade assessments. These assessments are used to determine the level of student mastery of grade-level standards as well as the degree of preparedness for promotion to the next grade level. Currently a majority of students are still struggling to meet grade-level expectations on these assessments. According to the assessments, the majority of students are not meeting the standards for proficiency in reading. This would indicate a failure in the MTSS instructional framework in making a difference in reading achievement. While steps have been taken to address the instructional elements of MTSS (such as Tier 1/core reading instruction), the current state of the MTSS framework in Pamlico County Schools is one of ineffectiveness.

Behavioral support is an element of MTSS that has presented tremendous challenges in Pamlico County. While academics are incredibly important, it is equally important to meet the behavioral needs of students. With an average of over 50 discipline referrals per month, student

behaviors at Fred A. Anderson Elementary are certainly having a negative impact on instruction, if for no other reason than instructional time for some students has diminished as a result of being out of class for office discipline referrals. Interestingly, the referrals do not all result in a suspension. In fact, on average, only around 20% of the referrals result in In-School or Out-of-School Suspensions. This would indicate a need for training in classroom management and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support so that the minor behavioral problems can be addressed at the classroom level. This would prevent excessive instances of missed class time due to behavior.

Themes of the Evaluation Results

Upon analysis of this program evaluation, several themes have emerged from the results. These themes stand out as causal agents in the unsuccessful implementation and execution of the MTSS process in Pamlico County Schools. All of the themes are closely related and significantly impact the MTSS process.

Inconsistent Leadership

The first theme is that there has been a breakdown in leadership regarding MTSS at the district level. This breakdown is the result of a tremendous amount of turnover and shifting responsibility. It is clear from the discussion with the Executive Director for Instructional Services that responsibility for MTSS has long been passed around without any serious oversight by the district leadership. Based on the context evaluation, there has been so little consistency in leadership that schools have been forced to adopt their own practices based upon their own interpretations of MTSS. This has resulted in a disjointed approach and inconsistency across campuses that has produced poor results.

Staff Turnover

The second theme that has emerged from the program evaluation is closely related to the first. This theme involves the inordinate amount of staff turnover at every level in the district. Due to retirement and transfers, district leadership roles have shifted greatly over the past six years. As a result of these retirements and ongoing budgetary demands, retired personnel have not been replaced or positions have been combined and responsibilities added to the remaining district leaders. This transition has not been beneficial to the MTSS process in Pamlico County as no one has accepted the role of MTSS coordinator. With this dearth of leadership, schools have been forced to implement the framework in their own way.

Unfortunately, turnover has not been limited to leadership positions. Over 50% of teachers surveyed in this evaluation have worked in the district for less than three years. Any organization that has a constant influx of new employees must develop a plan to train new employees in organizational norms and procedures. This is vitally important with the MTSS expectations of Pamlico County Schools. With the amount of turnover experienced in the district to date, it is necessary to have a clearly defined plan to communicate school and district instructional expectations to new staff so that consistency in policy and practice may be developed. This has not been able to happen due to the turnover in leadership in the schools. Principal tenure at both Pamlico County Primary School and Fred A. Anderson Elementary School has been so brief over the past six years that no consistent routine in instructional practice may be developed.

Lack of Training

The final theme identified in the MTSS Program Evaluation is the distinct overall ignorance of the MTSS process by staff members in the district. This is a direct result of a lack of

professional development and training. While one could argue that professional development has been provided to staff members over the past few years, it has never been focused on MTSS specifically. As a result, the majority of staff members claim to be unfamiliar with the MTSS instructional framework.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations for improvement that can be made to increase the likelihood of success for MTSS in the district. These recommendations are based upon careful analysis of the evaluation data. These recommendations include:

- Training for MTSS must become a priority in the Pamlico County School District.
- District leadership must develop and clearly communicate a vision for MTSS.
- Overall staff turnover at every level in the district must be reduced and stabilized.

The recommendations are intended to address the themes that were identified by the evaluation and begin the process of improvement for MTSS in Pamlico County.

Prioritize Training for MTSS

It is clear from this program evaluation that MTSS has never been effectively implemented in the district. This can be attributed to a number of things such as shifting leadership roles or staff turnover. However, a main cause for the lack of success in MTSS is rooted in a general misunderstanding of the MTSS instructional framework. As the Executive Director of Instructional Services indicated in her interview, MTSS was implemented in Pamlico County Schools in an attempt to improve the overall reading proficiency in the district and improve test scores. While this is not a poor reason for implementation, it was implemented in a way that gave the impression that it was a program that would be added to the general instructional program already in place. There was also a common misunderstanding that it was a

new way to qualify students for special education services so regular education teachers failed to see any purpose in the process beyond this. If MTSS is to ever be successful, quality training must be provided so that all staff members understand that MTSS is an instructional framework that is focused on improving teaching practices.

Survey results clearly show that the overwhelming majority of staff members are not familiar enough with MTSS to effectively implement it. Training will accomplish two things. It will first bring a consistent level of familiarity to all staff members. Expectations can be, for once, clearly understood across each campus. Secondly, training will help to diminish the negative assumptions about MTSS that have been created over the past few years. MTSS is far more than an accountability piece for teachers. It is more than a means by which students can be identified for special education services. It is certainly more than a paper trail, which is a notion that has, to date, been widely accepted by teachers in Pamlico County. Rather, MTSS is a school-wide framework for instructional improvement, where each student's individual needs are met. Quality professional development and training will help to clearly communicate this message and teach educators how this can be accomplished.

Training must include an emphasis on improving teaching at the core or Tier 1 level. Core instruction has recently become a center-piece of improvement goals at both PCPS and FAA. This needs to continue. Tier 1 of MTSS is a critical, foundational component of the framework. For too long, it has been ignored. As the principal at FAA shared in her interview, the school must move past the notion of there being a problem with students learning. Rather there is a problem with instructional delivery that is impacting the ability of students to learn. It is of supreme importance for this to continue to be addressed.

Professional development and training for MTSS should be well-planned and systematic. For too long, if training was offered at all, it has involved a one-time session with very little follow-up. This has contributed to the confusion. Training must begin with a general overview of the MTSS framework. It should also include extensive training on the MTSS approach to instructional delivery with a major emphasis on how to deliver differentiated, core instruction. Next, there must be training for Tier 2 and 3 interventions. Teachers must understand how to select and deliver appropriate interventions for students. Finally, there must be consistent follow-up on the training to reinforce expectations and clear up confusion. If a culture change is to truly take place, quality professional development must be thoroughly planned and delivered.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support must be implemented at both schools. If MTSS is a combination of RTI and PBIS, then it is fair to say that half of the MTSS framework is currently missing in Pamlico County Schools. Both principals know this, but to date all efforts have been focused on academics instead of behavior. In reality, academics and behavior are not exclusive of one another as students must be able to focus in order to learn. If classroom behaviors prevent a student from focusing, or if a student's behavior prevents other students from learning, then it absolutely must be addressed. Training in PBIS is essential if the true potential of MTSS is ever to be realized.

Develop a Vision

It is critical that Pamlico County Schools adopt a vision for MTSS in each school and that it is clearly communicated by district-level leadership. Positive consistency will never be achieved without a cohesive vision that expresses expectations in a clear manner. Someone at the district level must take charge and work together with principals to bring about positive change. This is not to say that the district should micro-manage schools. Rather, a consistent vision

would bring schools together and ensure that instructional practices are consistent and sound across grade levels and campuses.

Consistent Staffing

It is also imperative to develop consistent leadership in the schools. Principals must be left in their positions long enough for them to impact genuine change. For too long, principal tenure in schools has been limited to two to three years. This type of turnover often trickles down, as teachers want to work in a stable, consistent environment. Hence, as principals come and go, so do teachers. Ideally, efforts must be made to retain building-level leadership as well as the teaching staff. Consistency in instruction will never be achieved until this becomes a reality. Each time a new principal is assigned to a school, this principal brings his or her own ideas and expectations to the job. It takes time for a teaching staff to adjust to these new expectations and for the faculty to work together as a team. This creates a school climate that is in a constant unsettled state. Staff turnover exacerbates issues with implementation of policies like MTSS.

Recommendations Beyond the District

While this evaluation has been focused on the MTSS framework of Pamlico County Schools, there are broader applications for this study and its recommendations. Pamlico County's problems implementing MTSS are not unique. Research clearly shows that MTSS is often poorly implemented due to confusion surrounding the process (Buffum et al., 2010). To address this issue, university teacher education and preparation programs must make MTSS training a priority. Students who are entering the teaching workforce need to come into those jobs with a better understanding of the MTSS instructional framework. It is also critical for school leaders to understand MTSS. Research also indicates that for MTSS to be effective, it must be implemented by knowledgeable leaders who have a clear understanding of the process (O'Connor & Freeman,

2012). Therefore, educational leadership programs must prepare school administrators to effectively implement the MTSS instructional framework in their schools.

Epilogue

This study was conducted for the purpose of improving the Multi-Tiered System of Support in Pamlico County Schools. The results of the evaluation will be shared with the superintendent of schools and other district leaders so that a new direction for MTSS might be achieved and that improvement in student reading might be realized.

In order for the confusion surrounding MTSS in Pamlico County to dissipate, leaders must first understand the problems and then develop a clear vision for MTSS. From this unified vision, a new plan for consistent implementation must be crafted, to include pertinent, impactful professional development. It is hoped that this program evaluation will provide valuable information that will allow the district's educational leaders to do just that.

Executive Summary

Over the past six years, student proficiency in reading has been a problem in the Pamlico County School District. A majority of students in grades K-5 are not considered proficient in reading based upon results from NC End of Grade Assessments. In an effort to change this trend and improve reading, an instructional framework known as Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) was implemented. Despite this implementation, students continue to struggle with reading. In an effort to understand why MTSS has been ineffective in improving reading proficiency, a program evaluation was conducted to determine areas of strength and weakness.

The CIPP approach to program evaluation was selected for this study. CIPP is a four-part evaluation process that studies the Context, Input, Process, and Product of the program that is being evaluated. The methods for data collection in this study involved surveys distributed to all

teachers in grades k-5 in the Pamlico County School District. In addition, a focus group of teachers was interviewed. Finally, interviews were conducted with building-level leadership as well as district leaders. Archival data such as End-of-Grade test scores were also analyzed.

Several themes emerged from the results of this evaluation. The first theme is that there has been inconsistent leadership during the implementation of MTSS in the district. A second theme is that there has been little to no training for staff members. Finally, staff turnover at all levels has contributed to the struggles for MTSS implantation in the district. Recommendations for improvement were developed from the evaluation. These include the development of a vision for MTSS in the district, proper training for staff members and consistent staffing in the schools.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 Call: 252-744-2914 · Fax
252-744-2284 Call: 252-744-2284 · www.ecu.edu/ORIC/irb

Not Human Subject Research Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Jeremy Johnson](#)
CC: [Jim McDowell](#)
Date: 8/7/2017
Re: [UMCIRB 17-000467](#)
Social/Behavioral IRB

On 8/7/2017, the IRB Chairperson (or designee) reviewed your proposed research and determined that it does not meet the federal definitions of research involving human participants, as applied by East Carolina University.

Therefore, it is with this determination that you may proceed with your research activity and no further action will be required. However, if you should want to modify your research activity, you must submit notification to the IRB before amending or altering this research activity to ensure that the proposed changes do not require additional UMCIRB review.

The UMCIRB appreciates your dedication to the ethical conduct of research. It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is being conducted in accordance with University policies and procedures, the ethical principles set forth in the Belmont Report, and the ethical standards of your profession. If you have questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact the UMCIRB office at 252-744-2914.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B : LETTER OF PROJECT ENDORSEMENT

PAMLICO COUNTY SCHOOLS



Lisa F. Jackson
Superintendent

Steven B. Curtis
Assistant Superintendent

507 Anderson Drive, Bayboro, NC, 28515
252-745-4171 (Phone) 252-745-4172 (Fax)
www.pamlico.k12.nc.us

February 1, 2017

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter to endorse the program evaluation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) in Pamlico County Schools by Jeremy Johnson, a doctoral student at East Carolina University. Mr. Johnson's work is critical to the success and improvement of our MTSS framework. I am very anxious for Mr. Johnson to complete the evaluation, as I see this as an important step in the overall improvement of MTSS in Pamlico County. I truly believe that if improvement is to occur, then we must first understand our areas of strength and weakness so that important decisions can be made moving forward. I am convinced that this program evaluation will help us to meet this goal and I enthusiastically support this endeavor.

Sincerely,


Lisa F. Jackson
Superintendent

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



Dear Participant,

As a doctoral student at East Carolina University in the Educational Leadership Department, I am asking you to take part in my program evaluation entitled, “A Program Evaluation of the Multi-Tier System of Support in Pamlico County Schools”.

The purpose of this study will be to evaluate the Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS) program of Pamlico County Schools to determine its capacity to positively impact reading proficiency in students. A program evaluation is needed to gauge the effectiveness of the process and give direction to the district as MTSS expands beyond its current implementation boundary in Grade 5 to include grades K-12. The goal of this study will be to inform decision makers about the strengths and weaknesses of the current program. Essentially, this evaluation will be diagnostic and formative in nature, so that the program might be improved

Your participation is completely voluntary.

You are being invited to take part in this evaluation because you have a direct impact on the implementation of MTSS in Pamlico County. The amount of time it will take you to complete this interview is approximately 30 minutes. I am also asking that you complete a brief online survey regarding MTSS.

If you agree to take part in this interview, you will be asked questions that relate to the MTSS process in Pamlico County. These questions will seek to determine if the MTSS process is meeting the objectives for the program, set forth by Pamlico County Schools. The interview process will be audio recorded to ensure proficiency of data collection.

This evaluation is overseen by the ECU Institutional Review Board. Therefore, some of the IRB members or the IRB staff may need to review my research data. However, the information you provide will not be linked to you. All data produced by this evaluation process will be completely confidential. If you consent to participate in the evaluation, please check the box below and sign.

Yes, I agree to participate in this study.

Yes, I agree to be audio recorded.

Participant’s Signature

Date

Program Evaluator’s Signature

Date

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this program evaluation.

Sincerely,
Jeremy B. Johnson

