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Response to Intervention: Importance of Parental Involvement

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Response to Intervention: Importance of Parental Involvement

by

Yanisvel Cordero

May 2015

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Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Science in Education

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current understanding that parents have of RTI. Many schools follow the RTI process in order to help a student who is not meeting the prescribed academic standards, and who is falling behind in a grade level. The proposed study addressed the problem of the current documentation being used with parents. The knowledge that parents currently have of RTI was explored through a short survey consisting of five questions. Based on the information gathered from the surveys, the research examined possible solutions to improve communication and provided ways to make the process and documentation of RTI more parent-friendly. This will allow for parents to be better informed on their children's academic progress.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The following quote from a parent was in response to one of the questions asked in a survey regarding parent knowledge on Response to Intervention (RTI). “I don’t know if he is (in RTI). This is the first time I’ve ever heard of this RTI.” There is a need for parents to be involved and informed in the process of RTI and on how essential it is to the success of their children in school. Many parents are not familiar with the educational support processes utilized to assist students in the academic learning and success in schools; and appear dumbfounded when they are informed their child is receiving academic interventions. It is important for parents to be aware of the process of RTI.

Problem Statement

Current research explains the importance of having parents involved in their child’s/children’s school if we want to maximize on the learning potential of their child/children and if we are to increase their academic growth and achievement exponentially (Epstein, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001). It is important for teachers and parents to work together to create a friendly home-school connection in order to create a reinforced relationship where students can excel (Okeke, 2014). While most parents feel they are involved, several are not aware of the diverse school programs and intervention methods to help their children succeed. Limited research has been conducted concerning parental understanding and involvement in the process of Response to Intervention; therefore, it is necessary to illuminate this problem. In many instances, parent involvement is limited because there are numerous barriers such as language, time, interests or priorities at the given moment (Yoder & Lopez, 2013).

Significance of the Problem

Education starts at home. Parents are in fact a child's first teacher and model for learning. It is part of the parents' responsibility to instill in children a love for learning and the motivation to excel academically. However, parents have their hands tied because they do not know how to help their children. This is where teachers help in creating a nurturing learning environment inclusive of authentic and culturally responsive learning experiences in which children can increase self-efficacy and their chances of academic success.

Through Response to Intervention (RTI), teachers are able to "implement high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learners' needs, monitor student progress, and adjust instruction based on the student's response (Bender & Shores, 2007). Students receive intervention supports which provide opportunities for students to develop and improve in their areas of need, as indicated by assessments conducted to determine the specific area(s) of need. Many times, parents are unaware of RTI and how it is used in the classroom. The problem at times lie within the modes of communication used in schools to share information with parents regarding the process of RTI and how it is used to support student learning.

My study is important because it will provide information regarding parents' current understanding of RTI. If such research is not conducted, teachers, educators, administrators and relevant staff may not be aware of parents' understanding and beliefs on RTI. Communication to parents regarding documentation discussing the RTI process it is at times vague, confusing and even, nonexistent.

Purpose for the Study

The purpose of my study was to investigate the current understanding that parents have on RTI. Many schools follow the RTI process in order to help a student who is not meeting standards, and who is falling behind in a grade level. Current research studies suggest that several parents do not understand the process, and are surprised when they are told their child is getting tiered intervention or is referred to special education. It is necessary for parents to understand the importance of involving themselves in the education of their children, and how in doing so, they are helping their children succeed academically.

My study was also conducted to explore how understandable the Response to Intervention (RTI) documentation is in providing parents with information about the process in relation to providing individualized instructional learning and support to their child/children. Based on the findings, improvements can be made on how to effectively communicate with parents in parent-friendly language to ensure a better understanding of the RTI process. Multiple factors can come into play when communicating with parents, which may include language and illiteracy.

My proposed study addressed the problem of the current documentation being used with parents. The knowledge that parents currently have on RTI was explored through a short survey consisting of five questions. Based on the information gathered from the surveys, the research examined possible solutions to improve communication, and provided ways to make the process and documentation of RTI more parent-friendly.

Research Questions

My methods and procedures were planned to be able to answer the following research questions:

- What is the current understanding that parents have on Response to Intervention?
- How can we involve parents and create an understanding of how Response to Intervention is used in the classroom?
- How can we improve documentation sent home concerning Response to Intervention and make it parent friendly?

Rationale

As a teacher in an elementary school, I am aware of the multiple attempts to increase students' academic success through the use of Response to Intervention (RTI). However, the documentation sent home may not be language-friendly, and parents do not understand the process. On occasions, parents are surprised when they are informed that their child is getting tiered interventions or is referred to special education. The information acquired from exploring parents' knowledge and understanding regarding RTI is important for teachers to know in order to improve the process of communication and create parent friendly documentation.

Definition of Terms

Response to Intervention: A way to support the needs of all learners through the use of scientifically-based curricula, ongoing assessments, and a three tiered model of service delivery that included implementation of instructional interventions with fidelity. It is also used as a means of gathering data to be used in making eligibility determinations for students suspected of having a learning disability (Shepherd & Salembier, 2011).

Study Approach

I conducted my research using the mixed research approach. Clark and Creswell (2015) define this approach as “a set of procedures for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a study to understand a research problem” (p.387). I followed the mixed methods research design to conduct my study in which I used both numbers and text to analyze findings and interpreted them to create themes. I strongly believe that the findings from this research will help illuminate the need for better communication between teachers and parents.

Summary

Parent involvement plays a major role in the academic success of children. When teachers and parents make a strong and positive home-school connection, children are more successful. In the area of Response to Intervention, there is a need for teachers to explain to parents in friendly language, the intervening academic support(s) that will be implemented to assist their children in their learning when falling behind academically. It is through effective communication that parents develop a better understanding of all aspects of RTI, and how it is used with their children to increase their chances of academic success.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Much research exists on the importance of parental involvement in the education of children in order to achieve academic excellence (Epstein, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001; Okeke, 2014; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Oftentimes, parents are dumbfounded when they hear their children are receiving intervention support services because they are falling behind academically and at times, are being referred to special education. Therefore, it is necessary to illuminate the problem that parents face regarding the many barriers that may impede their participation in their child's/children's school and programs for their children (Yoder & Lopez, 2013).

My study is an investigation of the importance of parental involvement in the process of Response to Intervention (RTI). In order to fully address the complexity of the issue at hand, this section of the report will be broken down into four subsections: History of RTI, RTI components, parental involvement, and barriers, and benefits of parental involvement in RTI.

History of Response to Intervention (RTI)

Response to Intervention has been a developing academic support process which started several decades ago in the middle of the twentieth century. It was not originally known as RTI, but as a process introduced to schools because the systems in place at that time were not effectively addressing the academic needs of the students. According to Jim Wright, author of the book *RTI toolkit: A practical guide for schools*, "In 1975, Congress passes Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act. This historic legislation required that school districts proactively seek out and identify children with school-related disabilities and provide them with appropriate education programs" (Wright, 2007). Over time, researchers created methods to improve the

academic interventions used at schools and the way the process was being monitored. A number of schools had misconceptions on appropriate ways to monitor student progress; thus several students were referred to special education without appropriate interventions, which resulted in a marked growth of special education students (Wright, 2007).

By the 1980s, several schools had adopted tools for academic monitoring allowing teachers to frequently track the student's academic progress in certain focus areas that were determined by those tools. It also provided teachers with organizers to use to track the information gathered, assess/evaluate it and be able to make changes to the intervention plan as needed (Wright, 2007). Wright mentions in his book the work conducted by Frank Gresham, a psychologist and co-author of the Social Skills Improvement System-Rating Scales, Classwide Intervention Program, and Intervention Guide. Through Gresham's work, the term "resistance to intervention" was introduced after a student failed to meet the expected goal for the intervention (Gresham, 2001). Later on, the term became known as what we call it today and was therefore adopted as "Response to Intervention" (Wright, 2007).

In 2004, Congress improved the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004), and gave freedom to schools to use "the student's 'response to scientific, research-based intervention' as a prime indicator for academic interventions (Wright, 2007). IDEIA 2004 was basically the change in law that gave wings to Response to Intervention in schools nationally.

Response to Intervention Components

According to Austin Buffum, Mike Mattos and Chris Weber, authors of the book *Pyramid Response to Intervention: RTI, Professional Learning Communities, and How to Respond when Kids Don't Learn*, Response to Intervention is:

1. Providing high-quality instruction and interventions that match students' needs.
2. Using students' learning progress over time and level of performance to make important education decisions (Buffum, Mattos & Webber, 2009).

This process enables schools to use a research-based intervention to academically support a student in a timely manner before he/she falls too far behind academically within a grade level. It is because of the process of RTI being implemented in a timely manner that many students are not referred to special education. RTI is not seen as a program but rather as a system for meeting all students' needs. It "blends systematic and engaging assessment, instruction, and school-classroom-parent communication to relentlessly improve student learning" (Buffum, Mattos & Webber, 2009)

Response to Intervention goes through a process of three tiers. This model is built like a pyramid, where the biggest group lies at the bottom of the pyramid on Tier 1, the next group is smaller and Tier 2, and the smallest group is at the top at Tier 3. These tiers are designed to increase the support given to students and the time spent on an intervention before changing tiers. The tiers are defined as follows:

1. *Tier 1: Core Program* (Instruction happening in the classroom, preventive stage)
 - a. This is the tier where universal screening is done for all students in the classroom to determine which students are falling behind in academics and need to be moved to Tier 2 interventions. (Buffum, Mattos & Webber, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Shepherd & Salembier, 2011).
2. *Tier 2: Supplemental support*
 - a. Support is given at least 3 days of the week for 20-30 minute sessions with small groups of students (5-8) targeting a specific skills through the use of 'researched

based, explicit, systematic and specific to student needs.” This intervention last six to eight weeks. Usually the teacher is the one to administer this intervention.

(Buffum, Mattos & Webber, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Shepherd & Salembier, 2011).

3. Tier 3: Intensive support

- a. Support is given daily in 30 minute sessions with a smaller group of students (1-4) targeting a specific skills through the use of ‘researched based, explicit, systematic and specific to student needs.’ This intervention last six to eight weeks. Usually a trained teacher or resource teacher gives the intervention. (Buffum, Mattos & Webber, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Shepherd & Salembier, 2011).

Gresham, in his article *Response to Intervention: An Alternative Means of Identifying Students as Emotionally Disturbed*, states the “central issue in using a RTI approach is the determination of ‘adequate’ and ‘inadequate’ response to intervention” (Gresham, 2005). The three tiers are used with research-based interventions and need to be performed with fidelity in order for results to be truly measurable (Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). The interventions are progress-monitored at various intervals, in order to keep track of the student’s academic progress. The tools to monitor students’ progress depends on the school district; however, many use AIMSweb, which according to the program’s main website states the following:

...is the leading assessment and RTI solution in school today—a complete web-based solution for universal screening, progress monitoring, and data management for grade K-12. AIMSweb provides guidance to administrators and teachers based on accurate, continuous, and direct student assessment. (www.aimsweb.com)

If the student goes through the three- tiered interventions, and is still not meeting the established academic benchmarks for the prescribed grade level, the student is then referred to special education. The purpose of the interventions are to work with students on areas that need to be strengthened in order to bring their skills and understandings up to grade level. The amount of support needed varies per child and is adjusted to meet the needs of the learner(s). The benefits of the “RTI approach is that it eliminates a ‘wait to fail’ situation because students get help promptly within the general education setting” (Klotz & Canter, 2007).

Parental Involvement in School and Barriers

Current research explains the importance of having parents involved in school if the students whose education we facilitate are to experience academic growth and success (Epstein, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hara & Burke, 1998; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Yoder & Lopez, 2008; Okeke, 2014). Although there is no specific definition for parental involvement, it has been defined through literature in similar ways. Epstein (1995) defines parental involvement as “...being involved with their children’s education and are consistently demonstrating good parenting skills, communicating with the school staff, volunteering their time in school, helping their children learn at home, taking an active role in school-related decision making, and who regularly collaborate with the school community” (Hara & Burke, 1998). Research has also shown that “early parental support as well as continuous involvement, has a significant positive effect on the child’s achievement, particularly for the entire duration of their early educational experience.

While most parents feel they are involved, they are not aware of the diverse school programs and intervention methods to help their children succeed. In some instances, parents may not be involved in school activities due to barriers experienced in being engaged with and

understanding processes of the educational institutions within which their children are learning (Okeke, 2014; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). In a study conducted by Okeke (2014), a sample size of 30 parents was interviewed and asked three questions on how to improve parental involvement and what strategies to use. One of the findings of the study indicated that “most parents do not always know how to get involved.” Some barriers found in various studies include but are not limited to:

1. Lack of time (Okeke, 2014)
2. Lack of childcare (Okeke, 2014)
3. No friendly school-parent welcoming policy in place (Okeke, 2014)
4. Do not know how to get involved (Okeke, 2014)
5. Intimidated by the operational structures of the school (Okeke, 2014)
6. Speak a different language (Yoder & Lopez, 2013)
7. Lack of resources (Yoder & Lopez, 2013)
8. Age of parents (Yoder & Lopez, 2013)
9. Feel marginalized (Yoder & Lopez, 2013)
10. Education jargon is intimidating (Byrd, 2011)

Teachers need to find strategies to involve parents in the education of their children and activities in school. By creating a positive home-school connection, teachers and parents can find a common ground and collaborate to increase the academic achievement and success of the student. Some of the barriers previously mentioned could be prevented by having inviting conversations, where teachers explain to parents the various systems and processes that the school has in place.

Parental Involvement in RTI and Benefits

Stephen (2011) suggests in his article *Educating and involving parents in the RTI process*, “the role of families in response to intervention has been minimal.” In many instances, parents are not aware of RTI and feel excluded, intimidated and limited in their understanding of the systems and processes in place in the schools and what is truly happening with their children in the classroom. The problem may be with the modes of communication used in schools to share information with parents regarding RTI. When introducing parents to RTI, teachers need to be conscious of the fact that it is difficult to understand. Communication to parents regarding documentation discussing the RTI process it is at times vague, confusing and even, nonexistent.

Klotz and Canter’s (2007) article on response to intervention states the following in making parent inclusive of the process:

The hallmarks of effective home-school collaboration include open communication and involvement of parents in all stages of the learning process. Being informed about the school’s RTI process is the first step to becoming an active partner.

(www.nasponline.org)

Stephen Byrd (2011) mentions in his article *Educating and Involving Parents in the Response to Intervention Process: The School’s Important Role*, that educating and involving parents in process of RTI is important for three main reasons:

1. RTI is complicated and can be difficult to understand.
2. Parents should be educated and involved in the process because RTI is also the process to make a referral to special education.
3. Research shows that when schools work to involve parents, outcomes are positive for students and parents.

The aforementioned reasons strongly support the significance for effectively informing parents and schools of why it's important for parents to be involved in the process of RTI. Research has shown that when parents are involved, students' academic achievement increases. Xitao Fan and Michael Chen's (2001) study focused on parental involvement and student achievement. They found a positive correlation, suggesting "when parent involvement increases, student achievement increases" (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Summary

Parents are faced with numerous obstacles that impede their participation in their children's education. Parental involvement is essential in education for many reasons. To educators, it means a support system to help enhance instruction in school and at home. To students, it demonstrates support and believe in education, motivating them to excel daily. To schools, it means support from the community to motivate students to do their best. Teachers and parents need to collaborate and find ways to create a connection between home and school. When processes are placed in schools such as Response to Intervention, parental involvement is at times nonexistent. It is important for parents to fully understand the process in order to increase their children's success of academic achievement. Most parents do not understand how the system works and are intimidated, therefore, retreating and not participating. It is important for schools to increase the communication to parents and create parent-friendly documentation explaining systems such as RTI. It has been found in research that there is a direct correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. A collaborative system of support needs to exist, because when "parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and it begins to work" (Epstein, 1995).

Chapter III: Methods and Procedures

Introduction

My study was designed to explore the knowledge that parents currently have on Response to Intervention (RTI). It is imperative for parent involvement to occur in the process of RTI because it means an extra support system in place to help students academically. Teachers need to create a home-school connection in which information is freely shared in regards to the students' academic developments and interventions. In my study, parents' survey's responses were analyzed regarding their understanding on RTI. This information was used to bring attention to the importance of informing parents on RTI and bring awareness to the documentation sent home which should be parent-friendly for optimal understanding.

Positionality of the Researcher

I am a bilingual special education teacher in an elementary school, working in a self-contained classroom with grades 3-5. I am aware of the frequent attempts to increase students' academic skills through the use of Response to Intervention (RTI). This school currently has the RTI process in place to help students falling behind academically. I am a strong believer that parents should be involved in every step of their children's education and RTI is one of the steps parents need to be aware of and understand. My study is important to the efforts of bringing awareness to the parents about how RTI is used and how effective it is in the education of their children. RTI is not only a method of increasing students' academic performance, but it also a great informational tool that can help parents understand more about the needs of their children as students and the resources that can assist in addressing those needs. Based on the information

collected about what parents know on RTI, a better understanding of the misconceptions behind RTI can be studied; thus aiding in creating better ways to inform parents about the RTI process.

Participants and Context

This research was conducted in an urban elementary school grades K-6 in Western New York State. The particular district has a diverse population of students from different racial backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. The school consist of a student population that is Hispanic and African American. All parents at this school were given equal opportunity to participate. The surveys sent home were translated and provided in English and Spanish.

Procedures of the Study

A total of 456 parents of monolingual and bilingual homes were given the opportunity to participate in my study. All parents were contacted via documents sent home in a sealed envelope through their children's school folder inviting them to be participants of my study. Parents who agreed to participate filled out a short survey of five questions (Appendix A) returned it resealed in a second envelope to school in their children's homework folder. Information from this survey helped answer the questions: What is the current understanding that parents have on Response to Intervention?

Data Collection Instruments and Analysis

A survey was the leading instrument to collect data in my study in order to explore the parent's current understanding on Response to Intervention.

Surveys

A survey (Appendix A) was sent to parents and included the following questions:

1. Do you know what Response to Intervention (RTI) means?
2. Do you know what Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 mean?
3. Do you have conversations with teachers regarding RTI?
4. Is our child receiving RTI? If so, in what Tier is he or she in?
5. What do you think are some of the strengths and areas for improvement in RTI?

This information was used to create data on parents' knowledge and understanding concerning RTI.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

This research was conducted in neutrality and the evidence was gathered using parents' responses to the survey questions regarding RTI. During that time, I analyzed data and coded it several times to find common themes. The findings helped me reflect on the understandings of the parents as demonstrated in their responses to the survey and information presented was revised to fit the conclusions.

Chapter IV: Findings/ Results/ Analysis

My study was conducted to develop an understanding of the improvements that can be made in effective communication between schools and parents regarding the RTI process, and on how to improve the RTI documentation sent to parents. It is necessary for parents to understand the importance of being active participants in the education of their children, and how in doing so, they are helping their children succeed academically. The data for my study was collected through a short parent survey with questions regarding their subject knowledge of RTI. Of the 456 surveys distributed querying parents of their knowledge and understanding of RTI, only 103 (23%) were returned.

Based on the information gathered from the surveys, information about parents' knowledge and understanding of RTI was found to be limited and will be explained further. A table was created with the number of parents who answered each question in both English and Spanish. These findings led to several conclusions about communication and participation of parents in RTI. The conclusions derived from the findings include survey results, use of language, and communication between parents and teachers.

Survey results

Appendix A shows the questions asked on the survey. The questions were asked in both English and Spanish in order to reach parents all parents at the focus school. Table 1 provides an overview of the parents' answers to the survey and are shown using numbers that represent both monolingual and bilingual answers to each of the questions. The answers to these questions will then be discussed fully and in detail along with the findings.

Table 1. Survey Results

Questions	Monolingual Parents		Bilingual Parents	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
# 1	28 (47%)	31 (53%)	6 (14%)	36 (86%)
#2	25 (42%)	34 (58%)	4 (10%)	38 (90%)
#3	19 (32%)	40 (68%)	10 (24%)	32 (76%)
#4	15 (25%)	44 (75%)	7 (17%)	35 (83%)

Question 1: Do you know what Response to Intervention (RTI) means?

This question was the most important from the survey because it gave me an insight into the true knowledge that parents have of RTI. Only 47% of monolingual parents and 14% of bilingual parents answered yes to this question. From the combined 34 parents, only 9 responded with comments about the question of what they thought RTI meant. From those 9 parents, only two answered the question correctly. One parent said, “I believe it is a program that helps identify children’s needs that are having certain difficulties” while the other mentioned that it is “how well a child responds to the work that is given to them.” The first comment discloses in essence what RTI means. The second is vague but attempts to answer that “interventions change according to how the child responds to work or how well they are performing”. The rest of the parents who responded had misconceptions or knew very little about RTI. Their answers are presented in the following statements:

- “I know that my child is involved in intervention classes to help with his speech and learning development.”

- “I believe it means how we respond and deal with our children in an intervention situation.”
- “Basically you want to know how children and parents react to different outcomes relating school, home, family and everyday life. “
- “Help students to intervention in secondary school. Developing a plan.”
- “Intervenir con el niño de la tarea. Reaccionar algún cambio en su personalidad que aprendió en la escuela. *[Intervene with the child in homework. React to any change in his or her personality that their learned in school].*
- “Es un porvenir muy Bueno para nuestros hijos.” *[It is a better future for our children].*
- “Intervenir en el aprendizaje como en la escuela y la tarea.” *[Intervene in the learning at school and with homework].*

The answers to question 1 indicate that parents have a very limited understanding of what RTI means.

Questions 2: Do you know what Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 mean?

Question 2 was asked to further analyze the parent understanding of RTI. As a reminder, the model of RTI is built like a pyramid, where the biggest group lies at the bottom of the pyramid on Tier 1, the next group is smaller on Tier 2, and the smallest group is at the top at Tier 3. These tiers are designed to increase the support given to students and the time spent on an intervention before changing tiers. Each time the student moves through the tiers from 1 to 3, the intervention time increases as well as the level of support. The size of the groups decreases while the level of support increases.

After analyzing parents' responses to question #2, 42% of monolingual parents and 10% bilingual parents responded yes to the question. From the 28 parents, only 10 parents made comments about their thoughts. Seven parents indicated they had a vague idea of what the tiers meant. This number does not correlate with the answers the first question, where many parents gave the wrong definition of RTI. One parent in particular responded incorrectly to question #1, and then provided a web-definition for question 2. The exact words from the parent's response was compared to the online definition and they matched. Three parents believed the tiers were levels of development or intervention. Finally, two parents thought that the tiers meant that the children were low academically.

Question 3: Do you have conversations with teachers regarding RTI?

Conversations between teachers and parents are of critical importance in order for parents to be informed about their child's academic progress and for teachers to have a better understanding of the student and how they perform outside the classroom. It is through these conversations that parents are informed of how their child is progressing academically, socially and emotionally in school and vice-versa. When it comes specifically to RTI, there is a difference in the conversation some teachers may have with only certain parents. This conversation usually takes place with students that are in Tier 2 and Tier 3 and are receiving interventions.

As discussed before, RTI is a process in which students who are struggling academically have their academic needs addressed in the tier in which they have been placed accordingly as determined via evaluations and assessments, and interventions are created to help the student in the specified area(s) of need. RTI starts in the classroom with core instruction. The first tier is where universal screening is done for all students in the classroom to determine which students are falling behind in academics and need to be moved to Tier 2 interventions. (Buffum, Mattos & Webber,

2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). If a student is not falling behind, those parents would not specifically hear about RTI in parent/teacher conversations. Only students who are in need of interventions would be going through the tiers; consequently, only those parents would be aware of why and how the teachers are helping and what interventions are being used in the process. Therefore, when it comes to analyzing parents' answers to question #3, I took into consideration that some parents who answered no, actually don't know what RTI is because their children have not received Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. From monolingual parents, 32% of parents as well as 24% of bilingual parents responded yes to having conversations with teachers regarding RTI. This totals 29 parents out of the 103 that returned the survey.

Question 4: Is your child receiving RTI? If so, in what tier is he or she in?

When teachers work with students on a daily basis and assess them, they are able to determine if the student is making adequate academic growth. If a child is falling behind, the teacher will find a research-based intervention to help the student in the determined area of need. Once this decision is made, the teacher will notify the parent via the letter illustrated in Appendix B in either English or Spanish. This letter should then spark a conversation between the teacher and the parents in order to inform them of the progress and the interventions in place as well as the goal of the intervention.

For Tier 2, the intervention is done by the teacher in the classroom three days of the week for 30 minutes. For Tier 3, the intervention is done outside the classroom for five days a week for 30 minutes. If the child does not meet the goals, the interventions are changed. Eventually, if the child makes progress, the student is moved from Tier 3 to Tier 2, or all the way down to Tier 1 with just core instruction. If the student does not meet the goals and keeps regressing after

changing interventions, there could be a referral to special education. There are currently 19 students receiving Tier 3 interventions in this particular building. From these 19 students, three students have gone on to receive Special Education Services, and five have met their goals, going back to Tier 2 services.

Based on the AIMSweb information from this particular building where the data is being gathered, there are a great number of students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. From the data in English Language Arts, there are 158 students receiving academic support in Tier 2, and 171 students receiving academic support in Tier 3. These two numbers combined make 329 students who are in Tier 2 and 3 just in ELA. In the mathematics intervention support component, there are 84 students in Tier 2 and 105 students in Tier 3. In combination, there are 189 students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. This information provides an overview of the number of students who are in need of intervention because they are not meeting grade level benchmarks. All these parents should be aware of what RTI is and does, and what interventions are being used to facilitate the learning of their children.

From the parents' responses to question #4, I was able to deduce that 25% of monolingual parents and 17% of bilingual parents answered yes to knowing that their child was in RTI. From those 18 parents, 8 knew what tier their child was in. Based on the numbers mentioned before about the number of students in Tier 2 and Tier 3, there are many parents who are unaware that their child is receiving interventions.

Question 5: What do you think are some of the strengths and areas for improvements in RTI?

The last question was included to find out what parents thought were strengths and areas for improvement in RTI. From the 103 parents, only 18 monolingual and 7 bilingual parents answered in a short response. Table 2 shows parents’ answers to question five.

Table 2 – Parents Responses to Question Five

Strengths	Areas of Improvement	Other
<p>1. “Reading and writing, working on comprehension.”</p> <p>2. “The teachers at this school make an effort and a plan to address this.”</p> <p>3. “Teachers have great communication with parents to let them know their child’s progress in all areas.”</p> <p>4. “Teachers are great at communication with the parents to tell them their child’s strengths and weaknesses.”</p>	<p>1. “Constant communication between parents and school.”</p> <p>2. “Informing parents of such programs offered to students. Parents are clueless as to what their children are being taught.”</p> <p>3. “Better communication with the parents.”</p> <p>4. “More communications and that it should not take as long as it does to start a program.”</p> <p>5. “Maybe telling the parents about it and explaining in better detail about what it actually is and what it will help my child with.”</p> <p>6. “Making more parents aware of what it is.”</p> <p>7. “Do home visits. Not every parent knows what’s best for their child.”</p>	<p>1. “Not sure.”</p> <p>2. “I don’t know.”</p> <p>3. “I don’t know. I am not familiar with the program.”</p> <p>4. “I need to learn more about it.”</p> <p>5. “I don’t know, can’t tell you.”</p> <p>6. “I don’t know what RTI means and so I can’t comment on improvement.”</p> <p>7. “Helping her with math.”</p> <p>8. “Si es un proceso para nuestros hijos, apoyo este programa.” [If it is a program to help students, I support it].</p> <p>9. “No sé qué escribir porque no estoy familiarizada con RTI.” [I don’t know what to write, not familiarized with RTI].</p> <p>10. “Me gustaría saber más que se refiere a RTI.” [I would like to know more what they mean with RTI].</p>

The majority of parents commented simply on not knowing what RTI means or commented on the need for teachers to provide better communication. This survey is a clear example of the current understanding that parents have of RTI.

Use of Language in the Survey

When it comes to the use of school terms and vocabulary by teachers in the field of education, parents struggle to comprehend the meaning of them. It is necessary for teachers to create parent-friendly conversations where the vocabulary is mentioned and discussed to the best of the teacher's abilities, so that parents have a basic understanding of the topic discussed.

When parents are not introduced to and provided a thorough understanding of the educational vocabulary used by teachers, they are clueless about the terms, therefore, they may be limited in their understanding of the information shared in relation to their child's academic progress. The survey includes the term of *Response to Intervention* and although the name might imply the meaning of what it is, it needs to be explicitly explained for optimal understanding. The same goes for the words *Tier 1*, *Tier 2*, and *Tier 3*. These tiers can be interpreted freely by anyone just by thinking of them as levels of something. These terms need to be part of the vocabulary used by teachers in conferences, so that parents fully understand what they mean and their significance with regard to their child's/children's learning, academic ability and academic success.

Communication between Parents and Teachers

When teachers first encounter a child who needs to go to tier 2, the teacher is required to send a letter home to parents informing them that their child is about to receive interventions because he or she is falling behind. Appendix B illustrates the letter that is sent to parents when

their child begins to receive interventions at Tier 2. What I noticed about the letter is that it uses the term of Response to Intervention as “response to scientific, research-based interventions.” The way the term is explained may have little meaning to the parent and does little to explain the process in language that is understandable and relatable to many parents.

When parents are aware of the teachers’ approaches and interventions used in the classroom, both can make instructional decisions that can help the targeted student. From the data previously discussed about the number of students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 at this particular school, the small number of parents that responded reflects the problem in communication that exists. From question four in the survey “*Is your child receiving RTI? If so, in what tier is he or she in?*” the data illustrated that only 22 parents knew that their child was receiving services. This shows a lack of effective communication between teachers and parents.

Summary

Based on the findings of this research, there is a serious need for improvement in communication between schools and parents regarding RTI. The data shows that parents’ knowledge about RTI is limited which could be the result of multiple factors. The survey results indicate the lack of parent understanding about RTI, which could be due to the use of educational jargon and the unfamiliar language used in the survey that is foreign to the parents. When students are receiving Tier 2 services, teachers should send a letter home informing the parents about the interventions that will be used. If this letter is too complex, which it is as shown on Appendix B, the parent will not understand what it means. There needs to be effective communication between parents and teachers about these terms in a language that is parent-friendly, so that they understand the true nature of RTI.

Chapter V: Conclusions

In conclusion, my research study indicates that parents have very minimal understanding about what Response to Intervention is and of the process. The data collected from the surveys was useful in answering the three research questions for my study. The first question was to find the current understanding that parents have on RTI. The second question attempted to answer how can we, as educators, involve parents and create an understanding of RTI, and how it is used in the classroom. Lastly, the third question was to determine how to improve documentation sent home concerning RTI, and how to make it parent-friendly. The conclusions derived from the data collection and analysis provided useful information to answer the previous questions and determine significant conclusions about communication between parents and teachers in relation to RTI.

In examining parents' understanding of RTI, their response to the survey demonstrated that parents have a very limited understanding of RTI. The surveys that were distributed in English and Spanish asked questions related to RTI that most parents were not able to understand. From the 456 surveys handed out, only 23% returned. This number is not encouraging and there could be multiple reasons as to why the other surveys were not returned. Some of those reasons might be that parents have a low literacy level and can't read the survey, they didn't understand what was being asked and therefore don't answer, while some may have considered the information sent home irrelevant or not a priority in responding to the survey. Some teachers helped in motivating students to return the survey by providing a reward at school. All in all, this research was based on 103 surveys.

In addition, parents seemed to not understand the terminology used by educators in school such as the term RTI. The survey answers provided insights into their understanding. Almost every

parent that answered the survey did not know, even when they attempted to explain in words. This is alarming as there are a significant number of students who are receiving RTI services. When having conversations with colleagues, they mention that when having conferences with parents, they mention terms such as intervention and AIMSweb as a way to show progress using a chart. Conversations needs to be explicit and friendly at the same time regarding RTI.

Furthermore, the problem at times lies within the modes of communication used in schools to share information with parents regarding RTI. Appendix B shows the letter sent home to parents to inform them when a student is receiving interventions. This letter is not specific enough or uses terminology that are beyond a parents' understanding. Language is not parent-friendly and therefore, guardians struggle in knowing RTI means and how it pertains to their child.

Implications for Teachers

There is a need to involve parents and create an understanding of how RTI is used in the classroom. This can be accomplished in parent-teacher conferences, where complex vocabulary can be described and presented using data already created for the student. A great way to explain to parents is to have a parents' mandatory meeting where RTI information as well as information about interventions is explicitly explained. In this meeting, parents will have an opportunity to ask questions about their concerns. To those parents who can't attend a meeting with the teacher, alternative means of communication can be arranged such as a phone conferences where the parent already has a copy of what will be discussed in the conversation. This might sound unrealistic; however, teachers can ensure a better understanding about RTI through these means. Most parents want their children to transition through his/her grade level smoothly; yet, there are areas of learning which become too difficult to understand for the student. This is the point where students

might fall behind and therefore interventions are needed to help them in their areas of need to increase their chances of experiencing academic success.

Additionally, documentation sent home needs to use language that is understandable to the parent to ensure that they comprehend the information and how it relates to their child/children's education. However, certain terms such as RTI, need to be reflected in the writing so that they see it and understand what it is. The current letter that this school uses can be condensed so that it presents the information parents need to know regarding their child's/children's learning in parent-friendly language. As teachers, we are comfortable with this information and we need to transmit that same comfort to parents by doing the same steps we take to ensure students understand complex information.

Implication for Parents

Parents should be encouraged to reach out to teachers and attempt to understand the information related to their child's progress academically. Many parents feel intimidated by the school system and how things are done. Some need to make an extra effort to return a teacher's phone call or be available for a home visit. There are many ways that a parent can collaborate with teachers and educators, even when information is beyond their understanding. Having a parent be knowledgeable about their child's academic strengths and areas of learning where improvement is needed is crucial for the success of the student. Knowing that parents support their children's academic growth and are a part of the conversation about their child/children's progress makes children more accountable for their learning. It also encourages children to perform their best because they see the value that parents have in their education. It motivates them to excel academically.

Final Thoughts

There were some limitations when doing this research. The first being that not all of the 456 parents responded the survey that was sent to their respective homes. Of the 456 parents to whom surveys were distributed, only 103 answered the surveys and not all of them provided responses in the comment sections. Although the number of surveys returned from parents was only a fraction of the number submitted, the data acquired for the surveys returned can be used to illustrate a general idea of what parents know about RTI.

If I were to do my research study over, the language in the survey would have being simplified even more, so that parent could understand. I would rewrite the survey differently to add more questions. Perhaps using the RTI in connection with the term “intervention” would have yielded more parent responses. The questions could have been written to be more open ended to collect more information from parents. However, this might have resulted in limited comments. When individuals fill out surveys, they tended to leave comments sections blank because of the extra step required in responding. For that reason, the questions had yes or no to be circled as an answer and a space for comments for those who wanted to do so.

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The return of this survey will be used as your consent to participate in this research.

Appendix A - Survey

PARENT SURVEY ON RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI)

1. DO YOU KNOW WHAT RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI) MEANS?

YES

NO

Comment:

2. DO YOU KNOW WHAT TIER 1, TIER 2 AND TIER 3 MEAN?

YES

NO

Comment:

3. DO YOU HAVE CONVERSATIONS WITH TEACHERS REGARDING RTI?

YES

NO

Comment:

4. IS YOUR CHILD RECEIVING RTI? IF SO, IN WHAT TIER IS HE OR SHE IN?

YES

NO

Comment:

5. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME OF THE STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN RTI?

Comment:

Appendix B – RTI Intervention Letter to Parents

Date:

Student:

Dear **(insert parent name)**,

In order to meet your child’s learning needs, **(student’s name)** will participate in interventions that are not provided to all students in the classroom. This process will include the assessment of your child’s response to scientific, research-based interventions with the intention of increasing your child’s success rate of learning grade level skills in **(core area)**.

The following evidenced-based interventions will be used: **(list strategies or programs)**

The intervention/s will be delivered **(frequency and duration)**.

As these strategies are implemented, your child’s performance data will be collected, reviewed and recorded. **(List tool here ex. AIMSweb or Teacher made informal assessment)**. The data will be collected every **(fill in frequency)** in the form of **(fill in collection type)**.

The goal of this intervention is to have your child make adequate progress after the intervention has been implemented for an appropriate period of time. Your child’s goal is: **(type goal here to include baseline data)**

Our plan is for your child to be successful. However, in the event that your child has not made adequate progress after these interventions have been implemented for a specific period of time, we will schedule a meeting to discuss the next steps. These steps may include more time in an intervention, or trying different interventions to design the most appropriate instructional program.

At any time, it is your right to request an educational evaluation to determine if there is a need for special programs and/or services. The information gathered through the intervention process will be considered as part of this evaluation.

Thank you for the opportunity of educating your child. We look forward to working with you and your child.

Sincerely,

Classroom Teacher Name

Classroom Teacher Phone Number