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The relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of response to intervention in one elementary school

Lynn M. Methner

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION IN ONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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Dissertation
Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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Ypsilanti Michigan
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Personal and professional accomplishments like the attainment of an advanced degree, are supported by family, friends and colleagues. I express my deepest gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to those who helped to guide me through this doctoral journey.

Even the most difficult tasks in life are made easier when supported by others. I am blessed with having a family who provided ongoing love and support through this process. My parents taught me to set goals in life and to pursue continuing education. I appreciate their love and support since they helped me become the person I am today. My husband, Jaime, my partner in every sense of the word: it is through your help and encouragement that this was possible. My beautiful daughters, Logan and Bryn: you are my inspiration.

I have been fortunate to work with many dedicated, intelligent and enthusiastic educators who helped me through this process. These colleagues have provided support and meaningful conversations about school culture and RTI. I also am deeply indebted to the staff who participated in this study for their eager and honest responses.

I thank Dr. Ron Williamson, my dissertation chair. It is through his support that this was made possible. He challenged, guided, and inspired me to reach farther than I thought possible and often kept me going when it seemed easier to give up. I also thank the members of my committee: Dr. Gary Marx, Dr. Barbara Bleyaert, and Dr. Janet Fisher for their support, advice, and areas of expertise.
This study investigated the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of Response to Intervention in one elementary school. It examined issues corresponding to change within a system, with particular attention to those relating to school culture. An ethnographic approach was used to gather data, including the collection of artifacts, observations, and interviews.

This study found that the implementation of RTI presents numerous organizational, school culture, and leadership challenges. At the organizational level, RTI affects the entire district by changing the instructional focus to include early intervening services and the process by which students are found eligible for special education. This impacts multiple aspects of the school: scheduling, the use of instructional staff, student placement in classes, budget issues, and professional development for staff. These organizational issues present a significant challenge for a district facing a serious financial crisis.

School culture plays a significant role in what is valued by the organization. Schools are a collection of individuals and their relationships with others. It is through these relationships and shared understanding that school culture is preserved. The school culture at Newberry is one of collaboration and teamwork; their relationships and shared values led to the successful implementation of RTI.

Schools are a microcosm of the community. While schools share numerous elements, each school culture is unique. To understand a group of people, it is important to understand the contextual elements that influence individual and institutional behaviors (Schein, 1992). The village of Newberry has a unique history of rugged pioneerism and
an interdependent relationship with state institutions that has influenced the school
culture. The staff was able to recognize the cultural and economic benefits of state
institutions and their influence on the make-up of the community and school population,
which resulted in a school climate conducive to implementing RTI.

This study found that school leadership plays a significant role in the implementation
of RTI. Newmann (1996) found that in the majority of schools studied, the school’s ability
to sustain new practices was largely dependent on the principal’s leadership. This study
found that one reason the staff at Newberry was able to successfully implement RTI was the
support and leadership from the school administration.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Educators have long wrestled with the issue of how to define learning disabilities and who should be served under that classification. The current method of identification by ability-achievement discrepancy has been under increasing scrutiny for several decades (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; Hale, 2008; Reschly & Hosp, 2004). Although the literature is generally supportive of the view that a discrepancy between ability and achievement is a characteristic of a specific learning disability (SLD), the current practice of using that construct is being called into question (Ahearn, 2003).

Several national educational associations and other sponsored groups have provided recommendations for improving the educational performance of students with learning disabilities (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). A major focus of these groups is the development of alternative methods, which might provide more appropriate and accurate identification of students with learning disabilities who need special education services. As this dialogue continues, the Response to Intervention (RTI) method is proposed as a method of prevention and as an alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy method of diagnosing learning disabilities (Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs, Bryant, & Davis, 2007; Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007).

In this era of change, the Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), also referred to as IDEA ’04, opened the door for alternative methods of identification. The current legislation stipulates that when determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, as defined by Section 602, “a local agency shall not be required to take into consideration whether a child has a severe
discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability” (IDEA, 2004). This paradigm shift makes way for alternate methods of identification, such as RTI, which has caught the attention of government and research organizations and is being lobbied as a solution to current weaknesses in identification.

**Statement of Problem**

Due to the importance of the proposed changes in identifying students with learning disabilities, educators and other stakeholders need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of RTI, which encompasses a process for evaluating whether students respond to high quality classroom instruction and evidence-based interventions as expected. RTI is typically a multi-tiered, prevention-intervention system with successive levels of instructional support for students who do not make adequate progress compared to their peers (Strecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). In addition to a thorough understanding of a RTI approach, educational leaders have an equally important task of implementation within an organization, which presents numerous organizational, school culture, and leadership challenges.

This qualitative study concerned issues corresponding to change, with particular attention to those relating to school culture. An ethnographic approach was used to gather data, including the collection of artifacts, observations, and interviews. Due to the importance of implementing RTI, this study examined the factors that influence the implementation of a RTI process in an elementary school with specific attention to school culture.
Conceptual Framework

This qualitative study examined the school culture and investigated the programs, history, and dynamics in one school system. For a deeper understanding of change within the school system, it is necessary to look at the historical perspective of school systems and the evolution of special education. The conceptual framework for investigating the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of RTI was based on Schein’s (2010) three levels of culture. Additionally, elements of an ecological perspective and organizational theory were used to more fully understand the development of culture and its impact on the implementation of RTI within a school.

Many practitioners believe that education has not fundamentally changed in more than a generation. Further, some researchers believe there is a deep, systemic incapacity in schools to develop, incorporate, or extend new ideas (Elmore, 1996; Newmann, 1996; Sarason, 1990). If this is the case, a paradigm shift such as RTI will have numerous political, social, and economic implications at federal, state, and local levels, with different groups negotiating over policy, practice, materials, and other resources. It is important to note that politics and conflict play a role in the development of the individual school culture. Documentation of this paradigm shift was evident in documents, observations and through interviews with staff.

Organizational Theory

School organizations are comprised of individuals with different philosophical beliefs and backgrounds. At the building level, relationships evolve over time and are influenced by what is valued by the organization (Schein, 1992). After years of research on schools, Sarason (1996) stated, “What I found was a culture of individuals, not a group concerned
with pedagogical theory, research, and practice. Each was concerned with himself or herself, not with the profession’s status, controversies, or pressures for change” (p. 367). This perspective is important when investigating relationships within the school and when considering the role individuals play and how these dynamics influence the implementation of RTI.

In addition to the values conveyed by the organizational leaders; individuals’ relationships with others and interactions can affect the dynamics within a school. This raises the question of whether some organizations are able to adapt or change more readily than others and, if so, what factors contribute to successful adaptation. Thus, data gathered in this study led to an analysis of the culture or institutional personality of the organization, to determine what characteristics influenced change within the organization.

Individuals play key roles in a school culture and are crucial in understanding the culture. In an organization, the assumptions about how people relate to each other reflect the basic beliefs of the culture. Sarason (1996) explained, “In our accustomed way of thinking and acting it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to look at and describe settings independent of the personalities of people” (p. 119). Sarason argued that it would be “illogical and foolish to deny that there is much to be learned about the school culture by studying individuals” (p. 119). This case study then, sought to understand the school culture as it related to the change within a system in regard to RTI.

Leadership also plays a significant role in the development and evolution of school culture. Schein (1992) stated, “neither culture nor leadership…can really be understood by itself” (p. 5). Although leadership can take many forms, the main figure representing leadership in most schools is the building principal. This position has certain responsibilities
including being the gatekeeper and gate-opener for their schools and connecting what is available in instructional programs for students (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). When it comes to implementing new programs such as RTI, the leadership of the principal is crucial, and without his or her leadership, intervention, and support, change is next to impossible (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998).

**Ecological Perspective**

Although there are many paradigms by which one can understand and interpret culture, an ecological paradigm complements the study of school culture. The focus of an ecological approach is to understand culture by “observable behavior and elicited meanings in relation to structures, policies, norms, [and] behaviors” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 59). Ecologists look for change and how it occurs among individuals, organizations, and the larger environment. They “emphasize adaptation rather than conflict, and they seek to understand how social systems persist and adapt to conflict as well as how they change” (p. 52). Looking at culture through this lens, individuals are seen as functioning within a social context, such as a school, that influences their behavior. This social context consists of the human and physical environments in which events take place and where social groups like family, peer networks, schools, and work settings are involved (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

**Purpose of the Study**

Educators face a daunting task when it comes to the successful implementation of new programs. School change is a multi-faceted issue, and to fully understand how organizations respond to innovation and change, it is necessary to look at how individuals react to change within an organization. This qualitative study examined issues related to
change, with particular attention to school culture. Whereas most school reforms are initially implemented, the majority never become fully embedded in the school culture (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This cycle, which suggests a general failure of schools to readily embrace change, offers a rationale for additional research in this area.

This study examined the influence of school culture on the implementation of RTI and investigated the history, programs, school culture, and other dynamics. The unit of analysis in this single case study was the implementation of a specific school improvement initiative at a specific site: RTI at an elementary school in northern Michigan. A qualitative approach was used to develop a holistic understanding of the way that people in the organization came to understand the implementation of RTI in their school. An ethnographic approach was used to develop meaning and create understanding from observation, interviews, and the collection of artifacts. Multiple sources of information assisted the researcher to verify and draw conclusions about the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of RTI in one elementary school.

The purpose of the study was to provide detailed information about the dynamics, relationships, and school culture issues inherent in the implementation of RTI. A qualitative approach was used to gather information about school culture and its impact on the implementation of RTI. This information has broad appeal to educational leaders who are considering effective change and implementation of RTI.
Significance of the Study

Response to Intervention (RTI) offers promise as an early intervening strategy and method of determining eligibility, but implementation of RTI within a school system presents a multitude of organizational, school cultural, and leadership challenges. This research examined how the culture of an organization influences the implementation of RTI in a school, using Schein’s (2010) three levels of culture as the conceptual framework. The significance of this research is rooted in the work of Phillips (1996) and others, who have conducted more than 3,100 school culture audits and found persuasive evidence to suggest that the connection between school culture and achievement is a reality and that culture influences everything that happens in a school.

Although there is substantial research on RTI, little is known about the relationship between school culture and the implementation of RTI. This qualitative study contributes to the professional knowledge related to school culture and RTI and provides a clearer understanding of that relationship. The results of this case study may not be generalizable because each school’s culture is unique and develops over time; however, this information may assist administrators in other schools to implement RTI in their schools.

Definition of Terms

A major issue for educators is what should be done to prevent or determine special education eligibility if a student doesn’t respond to standard instruction and demonstrate the expected academic growth. The Response to Intervention method is proposed as a preventative measure and an alternative to the current discrepancy method of identifying students with specific learning disabilities. This study considered the influence of school
culture on the implementation of a significant policy change in the process of evaluating students for specific learning disabilities.

The following terms are related to concepts in this study:

Public Law 94-142 (1975), the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* of 1975 provided for a free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities, according to an individualized education program. P.L. 94-142 was reenacted in 1997 as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA* (1997). All federal special education mandates since P.L. 94-142 have defined special education as “individual instruction, at no cost to the parent or guardian, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007, p. 4).

By the late 1980s, increasing numbers of students were eligible for special services because of a specific learning disability (SLD). A specific learning disability has been defined as “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, spell, write, or to do mathematical calculations” (IDEA, 2004). Despite the definition, the IDEA regulations contain no reference to psychological processing. Instead, the focus has been on the discrepancy between ability and achievement, commonly referred to as the discrepancy method.

IDEA (1997) was reauthorized again in 2004 and is sometimes called the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* or IDEIA (2004). The latest reauthorization provides legal authority for implementing a problem-solving delivery system, such as the Response to Intervention method. Response to Intervention (RTI) is the practice of providing high quality instruction or intervention matched to the student’s needs, and
using the learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions.

RTI usually consists of a three-tier system with interventions increasing in intensity prior to eligibility for special education services. This change is tied to No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), in which research-based interventions are tried prior to eligibility, so that children are not found eligible for special education services if the determinant factor is lack of appropriate instruction. Both RTI and NCLB stress the use of interventions prior to eligibility. An intervention is defined as a scientifically-based instructional method to provide the student with appropriate learning opportunities. Although the types of intervention may vary, the main requirement is assessing the individual’s skill deficits and providing instructional interventions that have a high probability of success.

Other terms include state education agency (SEA) and local educational agency (LEA). These terms are important because of new provisions within IDEA 2004, wherein SEAs will need to make decisions about the extent and type of state direction and guidance to be provided to the LEAs regarding implementation. Successful implementation of RTI will depend on several factors, including the ability of general and special educators to use RTI reliably and effectively.

**Research Question**

The following research question guided this study: “What is the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of RTI?”

In light of the chasm between research and practice, which is often a major obstacle, this research question becomes important, as a growing number of districts begin implementation. Research is supportive of a RTI approach; however, there is less information
on the actual implementation (Fuchs et al., 2007; Jimerson et al., 2007). Although support for a RTI approach is growing, implementation will result in a significant paradigm shift in which regular education staff will ultimately be responsible for pre-referral interventions and evaluations of students suspected of having a learning disability. The case study method in this research, which examined the implementation of RTI in an elementary school showed evidence of this paradigm shift in policies and procedures, observations, and interviews.

**Limitations**

Although safeguards were in place to ensure the integrity of the data collection about the factor of school culture in regards to the implementation of RTI, aspects of this qualitative study may have affected data collection and limited findings.

1. The researcher recognized that school change is complicated and influenced by a variety of factors in addition to school culture and leadership. Additional factors include internal and external factors, such as the culture of the community, student and staff demographics, and the amount and type of professional development offered.

2. The researcher was not able to require participation, thus, the study relied on voluntary responses from school staff.

3. The researcher assumed the answers from the principal and other staff were accurate and truthful.

4. The researcher recognized that the case study of one school might impose limitations on the generalizability of the findings.
**Delimitations**

Charles (1995) stated that the researcher often places restrictions on the study to have a narrower focus. The following delimitations were imposed by the nature of this study:

1. Data collection took place at one elementary school in Michigan.
2. The school was selected based on a variety of factors, including the location.
3. Data was collected through a variety of means, including artifacts, observations, and interviews. The researcher realized that the data collection, although in-depth, may not be exhaustive.
4. Data collection took place during the 2011–2012 school year.

**Summary**

This study was introduced with background information about special education and Response to Intervention. As school districts move toward the implementation of RTI, a variety of factors need to be examined for successful, comprehensive, school-wide change to develop and sustain new practices. Research about school change has identified school culture as a key factor for successful implementation.

In the last few decades, data have shown tremendous growth in the number of students identified with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), while at the same time, documenting increasing criticism of the current method of identification. The Reauthorization of IDEA (2004) and the proposed RTI method of identification represent a paradigm shift, in which regular education staff will ultimately be responsible for the pre-referral interventions and evaluation of students suspected of having a learning disability. Research has been generally supportive of a RTI approach, but offers little information about the process involved in successful implementation.
As most research focuses on the components of RTI and not on the implementation, the research question that guided this case study asks, what is the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of RTI? This is an important research topic because the pattern of adopting change in schools indicates that schools are typically slow to embrace change and, although change may be initiated, the majority of changes never become fully embedded in school culture (Bolman & Deal, 2003).
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of the literature for this study is a synthesis of related research findings divided into three main areas: (a) special education legislation (b) Response to Intervention (RTI) and (c) school culture. Because this study investigated how culture influences the implementation of RTI within an elementary school, research on the role of leadership in the development of school culture is fundamental to the study.

The first section includes a review of the history of special education legislation, IDEA regulations, and information on the identification of specific learning disabilities (SLD). The literature on Response to Intervention provides a thorough understanding of RTI, research at the federal level, state-led initiatives, and a meta-analysis of RTI models. The third section includes findings related to school reform, research on school culture, including Schein’s (2010) levels of culture, and the role of the individual and the function of leadership.

Special Education Legislation

In 1975, Congress passed Public law 94-142, also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The initial purpose of this legislation was to provide a free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities eligible for special education and the development of an Individualized Education Plan. The Child Find process was successful and resulted in significant numbers of students found eligible for special education. By the 1980s however, questions arose about the effectiveness of special education programs, especially for higher-functioning students, such as those with specific learning disabilities. In 1990, P.L. 94-142 was reauthorized and passed by Congress as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Action or IDEA (Public Law 101-476) and the
legislation was reauthorized again in 1997 (IDEA 97/Public Law 105-17). The changes made in the 1997 reform were the most comprehensive since its inception in 1975. IDEA ’97 set in motion the theory of accountability based on student performance rather than procedural issues. Changes in the evaluation process required “a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional and developmental information, including information provided by the parent, that may assist in determining whether the child is a child with a disability” (20 U.S.C. 1414(a)(2)(A). These changes permitted the use of existing data similar to the problem-solving process of RTI.

Although IDEA ’97 included a number of significant changes, widespread use of these assessment practices did not occur. In November 2004, Congress reauthorized IDEA (2004) and included statements supporting intensive pre-referral interventions. The 2004 legislation does not require the use of RTI but supports its use as an intervention and method of identification. Furthermore, No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) and IDEA 2004 are aligned in their expectation of scientifically based curriculum and instruction, a focus on earlier intervention, effective use of resources, and improved student achievement.

**IDEA regulations.** Most states have adopted the exact federal IDEA provisions for Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) definition and identification. In the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) The IDEA regulations define SLD as:

i) General. The term means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.
(ii) Disorders not included. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbances, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantages” [CFR 300.7(c)(10)].

Despite the definition, the IDEA regulations concerning identification of learning disabilities do not reference psychological processes. Rather, they focus on the discrepancy between ability and achievement in setting criteria for determining eligibility.

Identification of specific learning disabilities. Even with the IDEA definition of a learning disability, there is no federally mandated method of identification. Instead, there are several different methods that meet the criterion of eligibility for SLD, which are used to verify the presence of a severe discrepancy between ability and achievement. Despite meeting the criterion for eligibility, Schrag (2000) reported that many of these methods of identification are criticized as invalid. Furthermore, a study by Renschly and Hosp (2004) found that despite states having moved toward a federal definition of SLD, significant variability continues between states on the criteria; a child could legitimately be found eligible in one state but not in another due to different requirements. Renschly and Hosp noted this wide discretion results in “some states having a prevalence of SLD as low as 2.85% in Kentucky, to a high of 9.43% in Rhode Island” (p. 199).

Bradley, Danielson, and Hallahan (2002) stated that “while there have been numerous attempts to find a quantifiable method to identify a learning disability in an objective manner, attempts to find a valid, purely numerical basis for determining a learning disability is not possible” (p. 383). Critics also argued that the discrepancy construct constitutes a wait-to-fail approach, with students experiencing prolonged failure prior to eligibility (Hale, 2008;
Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). The current interest in other methods of identifying students with learning disabilities stems from this and a number of other criticisms.

These concerns have led a growing number of professionals to question the current method of determining eligibility and to look for alternatives. Accurate identification of students with learning disabilities is important because there has been an increase of 150-200% in the number of students identified with learning disabilities (LD) over the last 25 years (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2002; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003). This is a pressing issue because the cost for special education pupils is almost twice that of general education students (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). At a time when districts are facing increasing budgetary constraints, combined with a growing dissatisfaction in the IQ-Achievement method of eligibility, educators are exploring other methods of determining eligibility.

**Special education summary.** In 1975, Congress passed the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* which provided free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities. The Child Find process was successful, and significant numbers of students were found eligible for special education services, including those who were identified as having specific learning disabilities. In 1990, P.L. 94-142 was reauthorized as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* or IDEA and was reauthorized again in 1997. IDEA ’97 introduced changes in the evaluation process to allow a problem-solving process or RTI. Congress reauthorized IDEA again in 2004 and included statements supporting the use of RTI. This legislation laid the groundwork for state and federal initiatives to implement RTI.
Response to Intervention Method

This study investigated the influence of school culture on the implementation of RTI in a selected elementary school. The literature review defines and provides background information on RTI, including an overview of RTI as a method of identifying students with disabilities, research on RTI at the federal level, state led initiatives, and a meta-analysis of RTI.

Response to Intervention defined. Response to Intervention (RTI) refers to a process that emphasizes how well students respond to changes in instruction. The essential elements of a RTI approach provide scientific, research-based instruction and interventions in general education; monitoring and measuring student progress in response to the instruction and interventions; and using these measures of student progress to shape instruction and make educational decisions. A number of leading national organizations and coalition groups, including the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities and the 14 organizations forming the 2004 Learning Disabilities (LD) Roundtable coalition, have outlined the core features of a RTI process as follows:

• High quality, research-based instruction and behavioral support in general education.
• Universal (school-wide or district-wide) screening of academics and behavior in order to determine which students need closer monitoring or additional interventions.
• Multiple tiers of increasingly intense scientific, research-based interventions that are matched to student need.
• Use of a collaborative approach by school staff for development, implementation, and monitoring of the intervention process.
• Continuous monitoring of student progress during the interventions, using objective information to determine if students are meeting goals.

• Follow-up measures providing information that the intervention was implemented as intended and with appropriate consistency.

• Documentation of parent involvement throughout the process.

• Documentation that any special education evaluation timelines specified in IDEA 2004 and in the state regulations are followed unless both the parents and the school team agree to an extension. (National Association of School Psychologist, 2007)

Growing interest in the proposed RTI method of identification has developed over the last decade due to dissatisfaction with severe discrepancy being the key element of identification. A growing consensus seems to be emerging for abandoning the requirement of a severe discrepancy in favor of a response to intervention model. Supporting that concept, the language in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), permitted school districts to include a scientific, research-based intervention process as part of the evaluation process for determining a child’s response.

The RTI method of identification of SLD has received the most attention in recent years (Hale, 2008; Strecker, 2008). RTI involves a multi-tiered process, in which students exhibiting learning difficulties are initially given instructional assistance within the general education setting. These interventions increase in intensity over time and involve ongoing evaluation. Those who are not successful with these interventions are referred for more extensive evaluation. Thus, RTI is both a preventative measure and a method of identification. Variations exist among RTI programs in the areas of length of time, intensity,
and duration; however, the basic concept is the same (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003).

Although there are many benefits of a RTI approach, concerns exist regarding the wide-scale implementation, which focus on instructional implications for regular and special education and would represent an enormous paradigm shift from current practices. Obstacles include resistance on the part of regular education staff, lack of training in research-based interventions, and disagreement on how the RTI program should look. Other theoretical concerns include the movement away from a non-categorical approach to service delivery and the implications of eliminating cognitive assessments (Fuchs et al., 2003).

RTI at the federal level. A study by Berkley, Bender, Peaster, and Saunders (2009) reviewed the progress of all 50 states in the development and implementation of RTI models one year after the final regulations for IDEA were passed. Data were collected by a review of existing state department of education web sites and follow-up conversations with representatives from each department of education. The results suggested that the extent varies to which RTI is officially being implemented at the state level across the country. At the time of the Berkley study, 15 states had adopted a RTI model and were implementing it on a large scale (n=9) or small scale (n=6). In addition, 22 states were in a development phase; 10 states were providing guidance to schools and districts, and only three states were not in the process of developing a model or providing guidance regarding RTI.

Berkley et al. (2009) also looked at how states were regulating SLD identification and what adopted RTI models looked like. It is interesting to note that although many states were using a problem-solving or blended approach, researchers actually favored a standard protocol approach, and problem-solving models had received criticism due to lack of
rigorous research about effectiveness (Fuchs, et al., 2003). Considering that one of the major criticisms of the discrepancy model was that there was too much variability between states (Renschly & Hosp, 2004), RTI seems to be following a similar pattern.

**State led initiatives.** Although the extent to which RTI is being implemented at the state level varies across the country, a number of states are leading the initiative. A study by Bergstrom (2008) examined the Illinois ASPIRE initiative, a RTI professional development project of the Illinois State Board of Education. A sequence of training was offered, which recognized that implementation will look different in every setting because the processes and procedures need to match the culture and resources of the local school. A standardized evaluation form was administered at the conclusion of each professional development event.

Qualitative reports gathered from participating teams indicated that effective leadership teams was one of the most frequently cited factors for facilitating successful implementation of RTI (Bergstrom, 2008). Respondents stated that a school-wide team with a highly involved administrator, who generates a supportive faculty, was the most important factor for facilitating the success of their school-wide RTI reform process. Bergstrom found that the second most frequently cited factor for facilitating the team’s success was the team’s involvement with the Illinois ASPIRE professional development series and that the “most frequently cited barriers for implementation were the lack of time and lack of administrator support” (p. 34).

**Meta-analysis of RTI.** In spite of growing support for the implementation of RTI models, to date, most of the research has focused on single components of a RTI model rather than RTI as a whole, (VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007). Whereas research on the various components is an important first step, it is also vital to evaluate full RTI
models, as they are integrated into districts or states. The purpose of a study by Dexter, Hughes, and Farmer (2008) was to review published studies on the effectiveness of fully integrated RTI models. Eleven studies were located that met the inclusion criteria; outcomes demonstrated improved academic performance and a slight overall decline in special education referrals and placement rates.

There were differences in the locations of the field studies but several supporting factors were consistent, including rich, ongoing professional development; administrative support at the system and building level; teacher buy-in and a willingness to re-examine their roles; involvement of all school personnel; and adequate time for coordination (Dexter et al., 2008). These studies provided a useful starting point; however, additional research is needed, as states move in the direction of developing models for the implementation of RTI.

**RTI summary.** RTI is a multi-tiered process, which provides interventions to students who are experiencing learning difficulties in the general education setting. Thus, RTI is both a preventative measure and method of identification. Although the research is supportive of a RTI approach, the extent to which it is being implemented varies across the county. Furthermore, a variety of factors such as school culture have been found to influence the implementation of RTI.

**School Culture**

This study investigated how the culture of a school influenced the implementation of a new initiative, examining external and internal factors that influenced the development of school culture, and how this, in turn, influenced the implementation of RTI. The following section of the literature review provides background information and the basis for this aspect
of the study. This section includes a definition of school culture, and discussion of the various levels of culture, the role of individuals, and the function of leadership.

School-wide reform. Implementation of RTI requires comprehensive, school-wide reform to develop and sustain the use of the data and instructional practices, (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007). Doing so involves attention to school-wide goals, school climate and culture, administrator and staff commitment, resources, professional development activities, instructional practices, and evaluation procedures. RTI implementation requires a substantial paradigm shift involving a change in beliefs and behaviors. Therefore, professional development cannot simply increase educators’ knowledge and skills of practices, but also must require an emphasis on building the capacity of educational leaders to support school system reform (Kratochwill, Volpiansky, Clements, & Ball, 2007).

The implementation of RTI requires substantial school-wide change; however, it is important to pay particular attention to school culture. Wagner (2006) and others referred to school culture as the missing link because most school improvement efforts have focused on curriculum alignment, assessments, and other reform trends with disappointing results (Peterson & Deal, 1998; Phillips, 1996). Several authors and researchers agreed and referred to “school climate, and more specifically to school culture, as an important but often overlooked components of school improvement” (Wagner, 2006, p. 41) School change issues, particularly those concerning interpersonal staff relationships and leadership, are areas investigated in this study.

School culture defined. “A standard definition of culture would include the
system of values, symbols and shared meaning of a group including the embodiment of these values, symbols, meanings into material objects and ritualized practices” (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1984, p. viii). Culture dictates what is of worth for a particular group and how members should think, feel, and behave. Schein (2010) stated that culture arises from three sources; the beliefs, values, and assumptions of the founders of the organization; the learning experiences of group members as their organization evolves; and new beliefs, values and assumptions brought by new members and new organizational leaders.

According to Deal and Peterson (1999), “The term culture provides a more accurate and intuitively appealing way to….understand [a] school’s own unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations that seem to permeate everything” (p. 2). Schein described culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions the group learned as it solved problems of external adaption and internal integration, that worked well enough to be considered valued” (1992, p. 12). The culture of a school, then, develops slowly over time as a result of the way the members deal with internal and external issues. Through this process, norms are established for the group.

Owen (1995) stated that these norms are based on fundamental assumptions about what the members of the organization believe to be true. “The cultural patterns that develop are highly enduring, have a powerful impact on performance, and shape the way people think, act and feel” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 4). Schein (2010) described culture as an abstraction, with powerful forces that are created as a result of social and organizational situations. These cultural forces are powerful because they often operate outside of our awareness making change difficult. Schein (2010) argued, it is important to understand the operation of these forces or we may become victim to them.
Understanding culture becomes very important when looking at change within a school. The culture of the school affects the priorities of the school and how and when decisions are made. In one sense, schools are very conservative institutions resistant to change. Owen (1995) suggested that schools have little incentive to change; Schein (1992) described this as *equilibrium*. Additionally, each school culture is unique, developing over time and based on the individuals within the system. Schools are collections of individuals and their relationships with others, each with their own perspective, beliefs, and values. It is through these relationships and shared understanding of their purpose that a school’s culture is preserved.

School leaders are often faced with the task of trying to change staff’s behaviors to get the organization to become more effective in response to external pressure. Understanding the concept of culture helps to explain staff responses and normalize them. Schein (2010) stated that if we understand the dynamics of culture, we will be less likely to be frustrated when faced with staff resistance and will have a deeper understanding of why various groups can be so different but also why it is so difficult to create lasting change. Even more important, if we understand culture, we will better understand ourselves and recognize the forces that define who we are (Schein, 2010).

**School culture: from macro level to individuals.** School culture can be viewed from a number of perspectives. From an ecological perspective, a key to understanding the culture of a school must also include the individuals and the relationships between the individuals within the schools. From this viewpoint, the relationships between teachers and principals are essentially political ones (Anderson, 1991), with issues of control and autonomy “fought out in subtle and not-so-subtle ways daily” (p. 120). The relationships
within a building significantly affect the school’s culture. Issues of power, values, allocation of resources, coalition building, manipulation of symbols, conflicting ideologies, and conflict affect how people treat and work with each other (Marshall, 1991).

To fully understand what goes on inside an organization, Schein (2010) stated that it is necessary to understand the macro context, because much of what goes on is a simple reflection of the national culture, and the interplay of subcultures. These subcultures often reflect the primary occupational cultures of the members of the organization. The subculture holds many of the same assumptions as the total organization but also holds assumptions beyond those, usually reflecting their functional tasks, occupations of their members, or their unique experiences. Thus, in a school system, the shared assumptions form around the functional units and are often based on similar educational backgrounds. Another kind of subculture, which isn’t acknowledged as frequently, reflects the common experiences of given levels within a hierarchy. Culture occurs through shared experiences of success and these methods are often transferred through communication or mentoring by more experienced members.

A formal definition of organizational culture can tell us what culture is from a structural point of view but it does not tell us the content of the particular organization. Schein (2010) stated that the most useful model for identifying the content dimensions of organizational culture derives from social psychology and group dynamics. All groups have the two issues of survival and adaptation to the external environment and integration of the internal processes to ensure the capacity to continue to survive and adapt. From an evolutionary sense, we need to identify the issues the group faces from the moment of its origin through its state of maturity and decline. This process of culture formation is, in a
sense, identical to the process of group formation in that a group identity is formed that includes shared patterns of thought, beliefs, feelings, and values that result from shared experiences and common learning. This is why it is so important to study the historical perspective of the organization.

A group cannot accomplish its tasks, function, and grow if it cannot manage its internal relationships. Schein (2010) stated the problems of internal integration include six tasks.

- The first task is creating a common language so members can communicate with and understand each other. This is an important task, with each organization using certain words and associated meaning to communicate with members.

- The second task is defining group boundaries and criteria for inclusion and exclusion. These group boundaries and criteria help members understand group norms for membership and help the organization function more efficiently.

- The third task for internal integration is distributing power, authority, and status, with each group working out its norms or pecking order. Consensus in this area is important to maintain order and manage group members’ feelings of aggression.

- The fourth task for internal integration is developing norms of trust, intimacy, friendship, and love. Members of an organization spend a considerable amount of time with each other and form relationships. Group members work out rules for peer relations. Consensus in this area is important for group members to feel safe and have a sense of well-being.

- The fifth task for internal integration is defining and allocating rewards and punishments. Each group must know what is acceptable and not acceptable for the
group and what is appropriate recognition or consequences. Again, these group-developed norms help members know what is expected and help manage behavior within the organization so that it is orderly and predictable.

- The sixth task for internal integration is explaining the unexplainable. Every group likes to make sense of things so they have meaning. This helps members respond and lessens the anxiety of dealing with things that are unexplainable and out of their control.

**Schein’s levels of culture.** “Culture is deep, wide and complex” (Schein, 1992, p. 143). Although schools share numerous common elements, each school culture is unique. To understand a group of people, an organization or a school, the assumptions, values, and artifacts of the group must be studied and understood. For the ecologist, this includes identifying those contextual elements that influence individual and institutional behavior or, in other words, those basic assumptions, values, and more observable aspects of the culture.

Culture is a multi-faceted phenomenon that is not easily understood; therefore, for this study, Schein’s (2010) three levels of organizational culture were used as a conceptual framework. Schein stated that it is best to think about organizational culture as existing at three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. Schein stated that culture can be analyzed at several different levels and uses the term *level* to indicate the degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible to the observer. The three levels of culture range from the very tangible, overt manifestations you can see and feel, to the deeply ingrained, unconscious assumptions people hold (Schein, 2010). Schein also used the term *basic assumptions* instead of *values*, inasmuch as assumptions tend to be taken for
granted by group members and are non-negotiable rather than values, which are open to discussion, and people can agree or disagree.

Schein’s (2010) first level of culture is *artifacts*, which he described as visible and touchable structures, processes, and observed behavior. Although visible, the meaning behind these artifacts is often difficult to decipher. Schein’s second level of culture, *espoused beliefs and values*, consists of ideals, goals, values, aspirations, ideologies, and rationalizations. It is important to note, however that these concepts may or may not be congruent with behavior and other artifacts. The third level of culture, *basic underlying assumptions*, is described by Schein as unconscious, taken for granted beliefs and values, which have a powerful influence on staff’s perception, thought, feelings, and behavior.

Schein’s framework was used in this study to assess the culture of a particular elementary school because Schein (1999) and other researchers asserted that culture affects every part of a school’s operations.

Data consisting of artifacts were collected regarding the school’s structure and processes, architecture, rituals, and icons that were noticeable to the observer. Structural elements such as mission statements, charters, formal descriptions of how the organization works and organization charts also are examples of artifacts. While this level is easy to observe, it is difficult to decipher because it is surface level information and influenced by the observer’s personal background, experiences and beliefs. While this provided the researcher with a good starting point, it only scratches the surface of understanding since it does not provide meaning into what the individuals in the organization believe. For a deeper understanding into organizational culture, one must examine espoused beliefs and values.
Schein’s (2010) second level of organizational culture is espoused beliefs and values. These values, beliefs and norms are an important part of an organization’s culture that develop over time and are unique to the organization. Espoused beliefs and values were captured through personal interviews, however it is important to note that values and beliefs are not always explicitly stated nor are they always consistent with behavior. Therefore, it is important to examine Schein’s third level of culture, basic underlying assumption that truly influence the organization’s functioning.

Schein (2010) argued that the real essence of culture lies in what he calls “basic underlying assumptions.” Although this level of culture is typically hidden and more difficult to recognize, it is powerful since it shapes the way individuals in the organization behave. Time was spent gathering multiple sources of data to assess the school’s culture, using Schein’s (2010) three levels of organizational culture as a conceptual framework. This assisted the researcher in analyzing the school culture and in drawing and verifying conclusions to determine the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of Response to Intervention in one elementary school.

Leadership

“Although much has been written about school reform in the past decade….insufficient attention has been given to the importance of relationships among the adults within the school” (Barth, 1990, p. xiv). Barth reported that the individual school is “the promising unit for analysis and the critical force for change and improvement of pupil performance” (p. 63), with research stressing the importance of the role of the school principal. Barth stated that “with strong leadership by the principal, a school is likely to be effective [and] without capable leadership, it is not” (p. 64).
Newmann (1996) found that in the majority of the schools studied, the school’s ability to sustain new practices was largely dependent on the principal’s leadership. Key factors included a commitment to shared governance, an entrepreneurial spirit, the principal as a buffer for the system, and the principal’s constant reminder of the school’s vision. Leadership, especially the role of the principal is a unit of analysis worth studying.

Sergiovani (1984) differentiated between two forms of leadership: tactical and strategic. Although tactical leaders emphasize the smooth management of the day-to-day operations, strategic leadership, on the other hand, “is the art and science of enlisting support for broader policies and purposes and for devising longer-range plans” (p. 105). Obviously, quality leadership requires a balance of both tactical and strategic leadership. How a school principal balances the dual aspects of management and leadership, significantly affects the culture of the school.

Regardless of the leadership style, the role that leaders play is crucial in school culture. Schein (1992) stated, “Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin” (p. 15). Schein also stated: Neither culture nor leadership, when one examines each closely, can really be understood by itself. In fact, one could argue that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture and that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to understand and work with culture (p. 5).

School leaders have a powerful influence on the culture of the school by a variety of means. Founders of organizations start the process of culture formation by imposing their own assumptions on the new group (Schein, 2010). For established schools or organizations, the leader’s assumptions become shared as a given and no longer something to be discussed. New members often view this as “how we do things around here.” While some school
leaders influence culture through charisma, there are a number of other mechanisms that help embed culture. Schein (2010) identifies twelve embedding mechanisms that are categorized into primary or secondary to designate between the more powerful, formal mechanisms and the secondary.

Schein (2010) described six primary embedding mechanisms that leaders may use to influence school culture and how members perceive, think, feel, and behave based on their own conscious and unconscious convictions. The most powerful mechanism that leaders have available is their attention, measurement, and control. This can mean anything they informally notice and comment on to things with which they measure more formally and deal with in a systematic way. This can be a subtle way of reinforcing what is valued, but it is the consistency of the reinforcement not the intensity of the action that is important. Leaders often share what is important to them through what is discussed at meetings and other activities devoted to budget planning and budgeting.

Leaders’ reactions, especially emotional ones when they get upset, can also convey a clear message of what is important and valued. The second way leaders embed culture is through their reactions to critical incidents and organizational crises (Schein, 2010). When organizations are faced with a crisis, the way the leader and others deal with it reveals important underlying assumptions and may also create new norms, values, and working procedures (Schein, 2010). A crisis may be especially significant in influencing culture due to the emotional response in staff and the need to reduce anxiety, which is a powerful motivator for new learning. If the group is able to collectively work through a crisis, they are more likely to remember what they have learned and use this information to repeat the behavior in order to avoid future anxiety.
The way that leaders allocate resources is the third embedding mechanism they may use to influence culture (Schein, 2010). How budgets are created and what is included often reveals the leader’s assumptions and beliefs. This is especially relevant in school settings that are often faced with reduced revenue due to declining enrollment and reduced state aid. The fourth mechanism for embedding culture is when leaders use deliberate role modeling, teaching and coaching. Again, this signifies what is important to the leader and has a strong influence on culture. School professional development then may clearly convey what is valued.

The fifth primary embedding mechanism (Schein, 2010) that leaders may use to embed culture is the way that they allocate rewards and status. Members of the organization learn from their own experiences with promotion, performance appraisals, and from discussion with others. Most organizations espouse a variety of values, some of which are intrinsically contradictory, so new employees must figure out what is really rewarded. Individuals can get a sense of what is really valued by observing actual promotions and performance reviews. How leaders select, promote and excommunicate members is one of the subtlest and yet most potent way through which leader’s assumptions are embedded and perpetuated (Schein, 2010). This is the sixth primary embedding mechanism leaders may use to influence the culture. This cultural embedding mechanism is subtle though and operates unconsciously in organizations. While this embedding mechanism and the others are listed separately, they all interact and tend to reinforce each other when the leader’s beliefs, values, and assumptions are consistent.

School leaders may use a variety of primary embedding mechanisms to influence school culture; however, there are several secondary reinforcement mechanisms that also
embed and transmit culture. Schein (2010) identified six secondary reinforcement mechanisms leaders may use. These include organizational design and structure, organizational systems and procedures, rites and rituals, design of physical space, stories about important events and people and finally formal statements of organizational philosophy, creeds and charters. These secondary embedding mechanisms are not as powerful as the primary embedding mechanisms yet still convey what is valued or of worth for the organization and can be used to embed or transmit culture.

**School culture and leadership summary.** The culture of a school reflects how and what decisions are made and how staff members treat each other. The culture of a school also reflects the traditions and values of the institution. Successful schools promote a shared focus on student learning and support the professionals within the community. School leaders play a critical role in shaping school culture and, therefore, have a profound effect on the institution’s ability to grow and change. The culture of a school can be understood by studying its structures, participants, and their interactions, the basic values and assumptions that members of the school believe in, and the study of the artifacts that reflect those beliefs. Each school has a unique culture. This influence of culture on the implementation of RTI makes for an interesting research question.

**Summary**

Special education legislation, Response to Intervention, and school culture, are the basis of this study. The background information included in the review of literature is significant because “Legislation is often influenced by the aspirations, hopes, and dreams of family members of those with disabilities coupled with theoretical models and aspirations of researchers. Rarely is there a strong empirical basis for proposed reform” (Gersten &
Dimino, 2006, p. 6). Dexter et. al, (2008) characterized the research base as emerging when they examined the impact of various models or approaches to RTI but cautioned that more longitudinal studies are needed. Although some research established the efficacy of components of RTI, more research is needed on wide-scale implementation of RTI and the factors necessary for successful implementation and maintenance; this is a crucial step or we run the risk of history repeating itself.

In addition to a thorough understanding of RTI, educators need to understand the role of school culture and leadership. Information in this chapter on school culture contributed to a more complete understanding of RTI and the necessity of a substantial school-wide change. Wagner (2006) and others referred to school culture as an important and often over-looked component of school improvement. The literature reviewed on RTI, school culture, and leadership related directly to this study and to many of the guiding questions for further investigation.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This case study examined the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) in a Northern Michigan elementary school. This is an important research topic because the implementation of RTI requires comprehensive, school-wide reform to develop and sustain the use of data and instructional practices (Danielson, Doolittle, & Bradley, 2007). Schools institutions tend to be very conservative and resistant to change. School culture dictates what is of worth for a particular group and is an important factor in issues of change. This study examined school culture and how it influenced a system in the process of implementing a new initiative such as RTI. This chapter includes a discussion of the research design and methods used to conduct this study as well as issues of reliability, validity and the importance of the findings.

Research Question

In the past few decades the number of students identified with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) has increased greatly; at the same time, there has been increasing criticism of the current method of identification (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Hale, 2008). The Reauthorization of IDEA, 2004, and the proposed RTI method of identification represent an important paradigm shift. Whereas research has been supportive of a RTI approach, there is not as much information on what this process looks like or information on successful implementation. The implementation of RTI requires significant school-wide change, but it is also important to pay attention to the factor of school culture. This concern led to the research question that guided this qualitative study: What is the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of RTI?
Research Tradition

Rubin and Babbie (2008) described research as a method of inquiry, “that is a way of learning and knowing things,” and that this can “guide decisions made in practice” (p. 1). Quantitative and qualitative methods are the two general approaches for the conduct of research studies. Although each approach has strengths and weaknesses, it is important to determine which approach will be most beneficial to meet the goals of the study.

The purpose of quantitative research is to investigate a “social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true” (Creswell, 1994, p. 2). Quantitative research involves describing a phenomenon, developing a hypothesis, and applying statistical tests to the variables to prove or reject the hypothesis. Essentially, the goal of quantitative research is to design and test theories using statistical operations, add to the current knowledge base, and describe the phenomena in this manner.

On the other hand, qualitative research is designed to develop a better understanding of people and the meaning they construct (Merriam, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) said that a qualitative approach is used to develop a holistic understanding of the way people in particular settings come to understand their world. “Qualitative research methods emphasize the depth of understanding, attempt to subjectively tap the deeper meaning of human experience, and are intended to generate theoretically rich observations” (Rubin & Babbie, 2008, p. 62). “One of the key strengths of qualitative research is the comprehensiveness of perspective it gives the researcher. By going directly to the social phenomenon under study
and observing it as completely as possible,” the researcher can develop a deeper understanding of it (p. 417).

Qualitative research is also especially appropriate for the study of social processes over time and to study those topics for which attitudes and behaviors can be best understood within their natural setting (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). This can be accomplished through a variety of measures, with the researcher being “the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). In the conduct of gathering data, the qualitative researcher spends time physically in the field to observe behavior in the natural setting. Qualitative research primarily uses words to describe the phenomena and is rich with description (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Reflection upon the data yields patterns and categories, and then further grouped into broad themes and tentative hypotheses, which have been inductively derived from the data (Merriam, 1998).

The qualitative, ethnographic methods selected for this study were appropriate for issues related to school culture and relationships and led to a better understanding of the relationship between school culture and the implementation of RTI in a single school. An ethnographic tradition pays particular attention to individual perspectives and their interpretation of the world, behavior in everyday situations, and the interaction between people and subgroups (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). LeCompte and Schensul (1999) stated, “Ethnography generates or builds theories of cultures or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave” (p. 8). According to Spradley (1980), ethnographers generally use three data-gathering techniques to assist them in understanding culture at its various levels. In this study, participant observation, interviewing, and document collection were the three main data collection techniques used.
In summary, a qualitative, ethnographic method was selected for this study because ethnography allows the researcher “a scientific approach to discovering and investigating social and cultural patterns and meanings in communities, institutions, and other social settings” (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 1). This method was selected because schools are communities with a unique makeup of individuals, groups and programs. Qualitative research is especially effective for studying subtle nuances in attitudes and behaviors and for examining social processes over time (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).

**Research Methods**

This study investigated the relationship between organizational culture and how culture influenced the implementation of RTI in one Northern Michigan elementary school. The qualitative, ethnographic approach was appropriate to develop meaning and create understanding from observations, interviews and the collection of artifacts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley, 1980).

**Selection of the school.** The school in this study was selected after consideration of a variety of factors including location. Information regarding district size, demographic information, and the willingness of administration to participate were also considered along with the following specific criteria.

- The school selected had to be an elementary school, which is defined as any combination of kindergarten through 5th grade.
• The school had to meet a certain size requirement, at least 50 to 100 students at each grade level. This narrowed the search to schools with a total population of 300 to 600. A school of this size was large enough for ample data collection opportunities but small enough to get an accurate sense of the school’s culture.

• The school had to be in the early stages of implementing a Response to Intervention approach for early intervening services and eligibility in at least one identified area; preferably reading fluency, comprehension, or basic reading.

• The building had to offer special education services, preferably an elementary resource room with at least two or three highly qualified special education staff.

• The principal and/or special education coordinator or director had to have at least three years’ experience, preferably more, in that role at that particular school. This was due to the importance of leadership as a factor in school culture (Schein, 1992), and ensured some consistency at the administrative level.

Participants. The purpose of this case study was to examine school culture and the implementation of RTI in a school, a process which requires significant change in the system. Because this study dealt with the relationships within a school and between programs, the role of school culture was also considered. Approval for the study involving individuals was granted by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (See Appendix A). The staff members in a specific elementary school were participants in this study, with observations and staff interviews being the primary source of information. The school administrator was informed of the purpose of the study from an initial contact, and a letter of informed consent was kept on file (See Appendix B). Barth (1990), Newmann (1996), and others stressed the importance of the principal’s leadership in issues of school
reform; thus, the staff, including the school administrator and classroom teachers was the primary unit of analysis in this study.

To protect the confidentiality of the staff members who participated in this study, fictitious names were used. Participation was voluntary, and the participants did not receive compensation. The subjects were not identified by name or other substantial identifier. Interviews of 19 teachers and three administrators were conducted over three days. The interviews included elementary classroom teachers, special education teachers and paraprofessionals, the physical education teacher, at-risk teacher, the RTI coordinator, special education supervisor, and the superintendent.

**Data collection.** This qualitative study examined the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of RTI in an elementary school. Schein (1999) and other researchers stated that culture affects every part of the school’s operations. For this reason, it is important for school leaders to understand and assess the school culture when considering new initiatives. Culture is a complex and multi-faceted subject that is not easily grasped; therefore, Schein’s (2010) three levels of organizational culture were used as the conceptual framework for this study: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. The Schein framework is consistent with a qualitative approach in which artifacts, observations and interviews would be the primary data collection techniques to gain a greater understanding of the impact of school culture on the implementation of RTI.

Schein (2010) described artifacts as the visible structures and processes, and observed behavior, although visible, is difficult to decipher. Although this offered a starting point, it was necessary to also gather community and historical information for meaning of what individuals in the organization believed and reasons for the way the school operated. I
included a historical perspective based on historical and community factors and their influence on school culture. For a deeper understanding into organizational culture, observations and interviews were conducted.

The second level of culture includes espoused beliefs and values; the ideals, goals, values and aspirations of the individuals within the organization. School Mission statements contain important guiding principles in regards to student learning and achievement. These values and beliefs are an important part of an organization’s culture. In this study, the researcher examined the values, beliefs and norms that developed over time in the organization in regard to special education. This was accomplished through personal interviews inasmuch as values and beliefs are not always explicitly stated or always consistent with observed behavior. Therefore, time was spent examining Schein’s third level of culture, those hidden aspects of culture, those basic underlying, unconscious, powerful assumptions that truly influence the organization’s performance.

An organization’s culture is embodied in the tangible artifacts and espoused beliefs and values, but the real essence of culture lies in what Schein (2010) called “basic underlying assumptions.” The researcher was able to identify the basic underlying assumptions by interviewing staff and though the triangulation of multiple sources of data in order to draw and verify conclusions. While school leaders often recognize the powerful impact of school culture, it often is difficult to assess and is an overlooked aspect of school improvement. This study used Schein’s framework to uncover the hidden elements of school culture which have a powerful influence on shaping the behavior of the individuals in the organization when it comes to the implementation of RTI. This is important since previous research has found persuasive evidence of a connection between school culture and student achievement.
Phillips also found a relationship between school culture and staff satisfaction, parent engagement and community support. This study examined the factor of school culture on the implementation of RTI. Data collection consisted of multiple measures including the review of artifacts, observations, and formal and informal interviews to help uncover basic underlying assumptions which are an underpinning of school culture.

Step 1. The first step in the data collection began with collection and analysis of documents and other artifacts related to the school’s structure and processes, architecture, icons, and rituals that were observed. Data collection began in the Fall of 2011 and included the collection of artifacts, including the school’s schedule, staff roster, policies and procedures in regard to RTI, student demographic information, school report card for the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report, a blueprint of the physical structure, and school board reports and minutes. These artifacts are an indication of culture and corresponded to the first level in Schein’s (2010) three levels of culture.

Documentation regarding the school environment was collected and analyzed to corroborate evidence, provide details to substantiate data gathered from other sources, and to help me to make inferences as data was collected (Yin, 2009). Artifacts related to the building, district, and the organization aided in data triangulation, offering information that could not be gathered through other data collection techniques. Many of these artifacts provided a historical perspective on the school and community. Document summary forms, including my reflective notes, were used to organize data collection and retrieval of the information as needed.

Step 2. The second step of data collection and analysis involved informal and formal
observations, which were conducted in a variety of settings, which allowed me to observe participants and acquire multiple points of view. Participant observation (Spradley, 1980) took place in elementary, middle, and high school levels, and in virtually every area of the buildings, including the common areas, central office, classrooms, hallways, the public library, RTI classroom, cafeteria, and gymnasium. Participants became familiar with the researcher in the process of these observations, and the data were collected in the researcher’s field notes. Observations helped me to clarify and add information on espoused beliefs and values and basic underlying assumptions.

Step 3. The third step in data collection for this study was staff interviews, the primary source of information leading to a better understanding of the implementation of RTI within the specific school district. These interviews were an important step in identifying staff member’s beliefs, values and basic underlying assumptions. Purposive sampling strategies, outlined by Patton (2001), included opportunistic and convenience sampling to allow for follow up of new leads. The author pointed out that the strength and logic behind purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in depth study.

Three types of interviews were used in this study: informal, semistructured, and structured. Informal conversational interviews using Grand Tour Questions (Spradley, 1980), were used initially to become familiar with staff, establish rapport, and identify staff for follow up interviews. The informal, casual interviews helped to establish my role in a non-threatening, genuine way and provided a general understanding of the culture and relationships at Newberry Elementary School. Impromptu conversations also took place with staff during the school day when staff recognized me outside of the school setting.

Semistructured and structured interviews were conducted with selected staff. An
Interview Protocol was established using a staff roster to select participants to interview. Priority was given to the administration, special education, and lower elementary staff because of the early intervening services offered through RTI; however, there was representation of all grades and programs. An Interview Guide Approach was used for the scheduled formal interviews with a number of questions identified in advance. The questions used in the Interview Guide Approach are listed in Appendix C. This type of interview instrumentation increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection somewhat systematic while allowing interviews to remain fairly conversational (Patton, 2001). In addition to face-to-face interviews, follow up phone calls and emails were used to clarify certain issues or questions.

*Step 4.* The fourth step in the process of data collection was to record personal observations and reflections. These notes and reflections were then discussed with a neutral party to assist in verification, drawing conclusions, and aided in the analysis of data gathered throughout the study. This important step helped me to remain neutral and to identify new leads.

**Data collection summary.** The data collection process for this study involved multiple steps, beginning with the collection and analysis of a variety of artifacts in the Fall of 2011. Data collection was ongoing during the 2011–2012 school year. Following this step, formal and informal observations and staff interviews were conducted. These data were recorded on Document Summary Forms and Contact Summary forms. The final step in the data collection process was the continued gathering of information through follow up phone calls, emails and conversations to gather additional data and follow up on leads. This step continued for approximately a year as the data was being analyzed.
Method for Data Analysis

For this qualitative study, a variety of data sources were used to verify information and to draw conclusions. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data analysis is continuous and early data analysis allows the researcher to collect additional data to fill in identified gaps or to test a hypothesis that may surface during analysis. Mile and Huberman suggested a process involving three components for data analysis: data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data reduction refers to the process of simplifying and transforming the data, which will be found later in field notes. This process allowed me to categorize or chunk data and identify patterns. Data reduction, while part of the analysis, is not a separate operation (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data display refers to “an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). The authors stated that data display can be achieved using a variety of formats, including matrices, charts, graphs, and networks. Again, data display is “part of the analysis” and not separate from the analysis (p. 11).

The third component suggested for data analysis is drawing and verifying conclusions. This process suggests that conclusions are made throughout the data collection process, where data is verified during the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process of verification may be brief or elaborate but adds to the idea of plausibility of findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I employed data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verifying as the process of data analysis for this study.
Legal, Ethical, and Moral Issues

Certain moral, ethical and legal obligations that must be addressed in the research design, during data collection and reporting. For this study, ethical issues were addressed in a manner consistent with the codes set forth by the National Research Act (1974) and monitored by Eastern Michigan University’s institutional review board. The study was approved by Eastern Michigan University’s Human Subject Review Committee and a copy was distributed to participants (See Appendix A). The school administrator was informed of the purpose of the study from the initial contact and a letter of informed consent was kept on file (See Appendix B). To protect the confidentiality of staff members who participated in this study, participants were afforded confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms. Participation was voluntary, and participants received no compensation. The participants were not identified in the final report by name or any other substantial identifier. Staff members who participated in interviews, in which tape recording was used, were asked to sign a letter of informed consent (See Appendix D).

Ethical issues specific to qualitative research were addressed in the following manner:

1. The researcher remained neutral or made it explicit when there were inevitable biases.

2. The researcher ensured trustworthiness by presenting herself as a researcher.

3. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, that they could discontinue at any time, and with the researcher being honest with how information was used.

4. The researcher maintained subjectivity by keeping a journal of experiences as well as triangulation of data with a neutral party.
Validity and Reliability

Like all research methods, qualitative research has distinctive strengths and weaknesses. One benefit of qualitative research is that it is especially effective for studying subtle nuances in social processes over time (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). This attribute lends itself well to examining a phenomenon such as the implementation of RTI; however, issues of research validity and reliability need to be addressed in the research design, data collection, and when drawing and verifying conclusions.

Internal validity or construct validity in research is often defined with terms such as truth, credibility, and authenticity (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). Strategies to increase the internal validity of qualitative research are extremely important when drawing and verifying conclusions. To ensure internal validity, the researcher used strategies including the use of thick, context-rich, and meaningful descriptions and triangulation using complementary methods and multiple data sources.

Lee (1991) suggested increasing the confidence in results “by linking three levels of understanding: the meaning and interpretations of our informants, our own interpretations of those meanings, and our confirmatory, theory-connected operations” (p. 263).

Yin’s (2003) three principles of data collection were also employed to most effectively address the issues of construct validity and reliability: multiple sources of evidence, the creation of a case study database, and a clear chain of evidence. The collection of multiple sources of data allowed for triangulation and ultimately made any reached conclusions stronger. A separate case study database allowed me and others the opportunity to review the data prior to the written narrative in the final report. This strategy helped to “markedly increase the reliability of the entire case study” (Yin, 2003, p. 102).
External validity concerns generalizability of the research findings beyond the immediate case study (Yin, 2009). This study examined the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of RTI by examining school culture through observation, review of artifacts, and interviews. While the results of the study may be useful to others, certain limitations exist which limit the ability of the results to be generalized to other schools. Firestone (1993) suggested three levels of generalization: from sample to population, analytic, and case-to-case transfer. Although this case study may not be generalized to the larger population, there may be similarities with other elementary schools perhaps allowing for a case-to-case transfer. Even then, there are limitations due to the variability in schools due to the unique nature of school culture.

The final test is reliability. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that the basic issue is whether there is reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases. One strategy to aid in reliability is to be explicit about the biases that exist. Another dimension, external reliability, is concerned with the replicability of the study by others (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Yin (2009, defined the test of reliability as “whether another researcher, following the same research procedures, would arrive at the same conclusion” (p. 45) Based on these concerns, it is important to have a clear process of documenting the steps in the research process.

**Limitations**

Factors and circumstances that may occur outside of the researcher’s control and influence (Charles, 1995); these factors may or may not affect data collection. The findings of this study may be limited by the following factors:
1. Many factors may influence the implementation of RTI in addition to school culture, including internal and external factors, such as the role of school leadership, the availability of professional development for staff, the role of the ISD, and other community factors.

2. Participation could not be required; thus, responses from school staff were voluntary.

3. The researcher assumed the answers from participants were accurate and truthful.

**Delimitations**

Researchers often place certain limitations on their study to narrow the focus (Charles, 1995). The following are delimitations for the study:

1. Data collection was limited to one elementary school in Michigan. The school was selected based on a variety of factors including location.

2. Data were collected through a variety of means, including artifacts, observations, and interviews. The data collection, although in-depth, may not be exhaustive.

3. Data collection was time limited and occurred during the 2011–2012 school year.

**Importance of the Findings**

School districts are often faced with the task of implementing initiatives during a time of declining resources. Although the focus is often on the new program or initiative, school culture often influences the sustainability of new initiatives. Owen (1995) and others suggested that schools have little incentive to change and are conservative institutions, often resistant to change. Understanding school culture then, helps to explain staff responses to change. Therefore, it is extremely beneficial for school administrators to know how the
culture of an organization influences the implementation of RTI. This case study helped to examine the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of RTI in one elementary school.

Summary

Methods that were used to conduct the research were outlined in this study, which also included the school selection process; legal, moral, and ethical issues; and discussions of reliability, validity, limitations and delimitations. Schein’s (2010) three levels of culture provided the conceptual framework and guided the steps for conducting the study. The processes of data collection, selection of participants, and methods for data analysis were described. As such, this study could be replicated by others and the findings confirmed.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study examined the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI). The unit of analysis was a single elementary school in Northern Michigan. A qualitative approach was used to examine issues corresponding to change, with particular attention to the role of school culture. An ethnographic approach was used to gather data, including the collection of artifacts, observations, and interviews with Schein’s (2010) three levels of culture as the conceptual framework. This information has broad appeal to school leaders who may be considering implementation of new initiatives such as the implementation of RTI.

School change is a multi-faceted issue, with most school reform initiatives being initially implemented, but yet never becoming fully ingrained in the school culture (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This suggests an important area of research because RTI is being proposed as a method of prevention, and an alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy method of diagnosing learning disabilities (Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs, Bryant, & Davis, 2007; Jimerson et al., 2007).

This qualitative study examined the relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of RTI at Newberry Elementary school. Phillips’ (1996) persuasive research evidence showed that the role of school culture is important. He noted the connection between school culture and achievement and that culture influences everything that happens in a school. Schein (1999) and other researchers stated that culture affects every part of the school’s operations; therefore, it is important for school leaders to understand and assess school culture when implementing new initiatives such as RTI. Schein’s (2010) three levels of culture—artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions—
were elements of the conceptual framework used to identify, organize, and analyze findings in this qualitative study.

Part One describes the school selection process and the rationale for the choice of Newberry Elementary School as the site for this study. Part Two includes a description of the school and its setting, and information about the community, students, key participants, and their roles at Newberry Elementary School. As a whole, Part Two offers a thorough understanding of the school and many of the dynamics that made Newberry a rich site for this study and identifies the events that led to the implementation of RTI at Newberry School, including some of the factors that influenced that decision.

Parts Three, Four, and Five include findings that correspond with Schein’s (2010) three levels of organizational culture: artifacts, the espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions of the staff at Newberry Elementary School. Part Three describes the culture of Newberry Elementary School, including the history of the community, background information on the early settlers in the village of Newberry, the start of the school system, and the history of state institutions. Part Four documents organizational issues associated with the implementation of RTI, including those surrounding curriculum, changing roles, and responsibilities of personnel, schedules, and allocation of resources as a result of the implementation of RTI. Issues relating to leadership make up Part Five. This is important, as Newmann (1996, p. 258) and other researchers found that “in the majority of schools studied, the school’s ability to sustain new practices was a largely dependent on the principal’s leadership.”

Part One: School selection. Nine Intermediate School Districts, the Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MASSE) and a number of other districts
were initially contacted regarding this study. These contacts were helpful in gauging the extent to which RTI was being implemented throughout Michigan. All potential sites were contacted by email and follow up conversations to determine whether the district met the particular criteria as outlined in the study. A database was developed to record potential sites and whether they met the following criteria for the study.

- School enrollment of 300 to 600 students; large enough for ample data collection opportunities but small enough to get an accurate sense of the school’s culture.
- School in the early stages of implementing Response to Intervention.
- School principal or special education coordinator had at least three years of experience, preferably longer, in that district.

It was important to select a site that met all of the criteria and was willing to participate in this study. In the selection process, most districts initially contacted were eliminated as potential sites because they were not in the early stages of implementing RTI or had recent changes in leadership. After six months, two potential sites were located that met the criteria. The choice of Newberry Elementary School was confirmed when the Eastern Upper Peninsula Intermediate School District asked Newberry staff, as a model on the implementation of RTI, to present at a leadership conference. Newberry’s Special Education Supervisor and RTI coordinator provided an overview of the process of implementation and the specific RTI model the school had implemented.

**Part two: Newberry Elementary School.** To better understand the unique process of implementing RTI at Newberry Elementary, it is important to first provide an introduction to the school, a description, staff involved in the process of implementing the RTI program, and the details of the RTI program from inception through the time of this study.
At first glance, Newberry Elementary School, set in the remote village of Newberry, in Luce County in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, doesn’t look much different from many other K-12 buildings built at the turn of the century (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Newberry School

The setting: A Description of Newberry School.

The Newberry School is located in the heart of the picturesque village of Newberry, MI, with a total population of 2,686 (U. S. Census, 2000). In this remote area, the school district covers 1,911 square miles and most people traveling through the area on M-28 would never pass the school. The school is located 3.3 miles north on M-123 and is located within 1.3 miles of the Newberry Correctional Facility.

Although the correctional facility is the major employer in the area, Superintendent Abbie Wallis said, “The prison didn’t attract people in the same socio-economic level as did the state hospital. When the state hospital closed 20 years ago, there was a mass exodus of professionals. This had a huge economic impact of the community.” As an indication of the
current level of poverty, the median household income for residents of Newberry was $29,052, as compared with the state average of $45,255 in 2009 (U. S. Census, 2000). See Appendix E for more information on district demographics.

The two- and three-story brick structure is set back from the road a modest distance with a small drop-off loop directly in front. The building also houses the district’s middle school, high school, and the district’s central office.

Across the street from the school, is a small convenience store and several other local businesses. The school stands alone on one block with the main entrance parallel to the road. The school has a loop for student drop-off and a few parking places generally reserved for visitors. Under the windows in front of the building are a few cedar shrubs and other landscaping. Visitors access the building through the main entrance, which leads to the public library housed on site and the foyer with access to the gymnasium, cafeteria, and central office. The high school is located to the left of the common area with the elementary wing located to the right of the common area.

Newberry Elementary School is part of the Tahquamenon Area School District, with the district’s central office located at the front of the building. This is the newer portion of the building and consists of a large common area with double doors leading to the cafeteria. The common area is lined with glass cases showcasing trophies and other sports memorabilia. The district’s central office has windows allowing office personnel to see much of what is going on in the common area and cafeteria. The office consists of a large rectangular counter enclosing two individual desks for the secretaries. In front of the counter is a designated waiting area with three fabric-covered chairs and a small table.
The office of Bridget Newcomb, the Special Education Supervisor, is located to the right of the counter and can be accessed directly from the waiting area. Farther back behind the counter is another door which leads to the office of Superintendent Abbie Wallis’ office. The offices of other key administrators, Peg Cobb, the Elementary Principal, and Ken Doran, High School Principal, are located in their respective wings of the building (See Appendix F for a blueprint of the elementary wing).

From the center or heart of the building, the school is divided into two sections. The elementary wing houses kindergarten through sixth grade and is located to the right of the main office. The elementary wing is the newest portion of the building and was built in the 1950s. The concrete block hallways have Positive Behavior Interventions Support (PBIS) posters displayed, with clearly posted expectations, and there are certificates outside of each classroom displaying the total number of positive Indian Tickets, the students earned for appropriate behavior. The Indian Tickets utilize the school mascot and are used to “catch students being good.” The marble tile floor is clean, and students’ work is displayed on the bulletin boards. The first floor contains the kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms, a special education classroom, the RTI room, computer lab, and separate offices for the elementary principal and secretary.

Most of the classrooms are of average size, with individual student desks, a teacher desk, book shelves, and an occasional table for group work. The RTI room contains a teacher desk and round work-tables in primary colors. In the library, a paraprofessional takes the time to explain how she helps students use the STAR program, a computer-based educational program, as a Tier III reading intervention three times a week. The second floor of the elementary wing contains the classrooms for the middle school students.
The high school is a three-story brick building, built in 1927, with later additions of gym, cafeteria, main entrance, and an elementary wing. The high school may be accessed through a separate entrance on the front of the building or inside the building and to the left of the main entrance. There is a sloped marble floor and adjacent stairs that indicate the transition to the older section of the building. The halls are decorated with student-designed murals, lockers, and an ornate wood banister leading to the second and third floor. When students are in class, the hallways are quiet, and there are many empty rooms due to declining enrollment. The high school program boasts a wood and metal shop, art room, auditorium on the second floor, ITV room, and the student health center. Although the building was observed to be generally clean, Bridget Newcomb, the special education supervisor, explained there have been cuts the last several years to the maintenance staff.

The students at Newberry Elementary. The students at Newberry Schools seem generally happy as they enter the building. The elementary, middle, and high schools are located in separate wings. The elementary students enter from a separate entrance, and the playground is located directly behind the main building. Tucked off to the side in the entrance way is a small chair and clipboard for the school’s Check-in, Check-out (CICO) program, which provides support for all elementary students who need additional behavioral support. This is a research-based, tier-two intervention, wherein students are assigned a check-in person or mentor. The student sets a daily goal and their progress is monitored throughout the day with the student meeting with their CICO person at the beginning and end of the day to review progress.

The students were animated in the classrooms and engaged in typical elementary behavior during the less structured times of the day. Table 1 shows demographics of
Newberry School enrollment of 363 elementary students, including 134 (17.5%) eligible for special education services in a total K-12 enrollment of 765. Although the percentage of designated special education students exceeds the state average of 13.99% (Scull & Winkler, 2011), it has decreased from the 22% the district had four years ago. Many students live in poverty; more than half of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch. The majority of the students are White, with smaller percentages of other ethnic groups. (See. Appendix G for more information on local special education rates and Appendix H for state averages.)

Table 1

Newberry School District Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education students</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-resident</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Enrollment</strong></td>
<td><strong>765</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic-Racial Demographics</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The district has been successful in implementing RTI and PBIS, through a creative use of time and existing staff, because the district has been in a financial crisis during the last several years due in part to declining enrollment. Despite obstacles, the decision to implement both PBIS for behavior and RTI for academics was staff-driven. The staff worked cooperatively to develop a schedule that would allow for an hour of differentiated instruction called *Power Hour*. To accomplish this, the staff had to be creative and use current staff members to provide the services, as they weren’t able to hire additional staff. Classroom teachers and teachers of specials (art, music, gym, and so on) provided instruction to groups with whom they normally wouldn’t work. This plan required some staff to give up some of their prep time, which was protected by their contractual agreements, to have enough staff available during Power Hour. The staff felt these concessions were necessary and the benefits of RTI outweighed the negatives.

Newberry and many other districts throughout the state have faced decreased revenue due to declining enrollment. The Newberry District had a total enrollment of 1,205 students in 1999, which dropped to 765 in 2011. The district’s general fund balance diminished from $838,804 in 2004 to a projected fund balance of $28,248 on February 1, 2012. To continue its current operations, the district reduced staff at all levels of the institution, collaborated with the ISD and others to share costs and resources and to leverage federal funds, and switched to summer tax collection and an annual vote for the full 18 mils as allowed by law. At the time of this study, the district continued to face a financial crisis, and it was unclear where other cuts could be made. These circumstances made the successful implementation of PBIS and RTI so surprising.
Many Newberry students receive remedial support through RTI, using a three-tier approach. Tier I comprises all students and uses universal support. Students are screened, and identified students receive additional Tier II support during Power Hour, the term for the block of time each day that is used for individualized instruction. Students are assessed each quarter and assigned additional remedial instruction during Power Hour or an enrichment time for students at or above grade level. Staff uses progress monitoring with some students being referred for an even higher level of support from the STARs teachers at Tier III. On a tour of the building, Bridget Newcomb explained how they were able to reduce the number of self-contained special education classrooms from three to one by inclusion and a more proactive approach using RTI.

Academically, the students at Newberry School are making adequate yearly progress (AYP), as measured by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). According to the Annual Education Report for Tahquamenon Area Schools, the Newberry District achieved AYP status for 2010. The elementary students met the AYP status for reading and math and received an Education Yes Report Card Grade of an A. The Middle school met the AYP status for reading and math and received an overall Education Yes Report Card Grade of a B. The High school students met AYP status for reading but not math and received an overall Education Yes Report Card Grade of a C. At the time of this study, districts were just being notified of their AYP status, and this information was not yet available to the public.

**The elementary staff at Newberry School.** Principal Peg Cobb, a secretary, 16 classroom teachers in grades k-5, three specials teacher, three special education teachers,
seven paraprofessionals, and the RTI coordinator make up the elementary school staff.

Newberry Students also benefit from a speech and language pathologist and full-time school counselor who supports the students with behavioral needs.

Most of the staff expressed a strong allegiance to the school and had positive comments regarding the relationship amongst the staff. When asked about the decision to implement RTI, Special Education Supervisor, Bridget Newcomb, said they “are a cohesive group,” and that the decision was really staff-driven. She said that every elementary teacher, except for two who had other commitments, met for two days during the summer and created a schedule to allow for Power Hour. Carey Suttor, the RTI Coordinator, echoed those sentiments, saying there was staff buy-in because “staff were ready for something new.”

The study participants and their roles. Newberry Elementary School, like many other districts, has a number of staff members with strong personalities, including veteran teachers and newer teachers who had differing views on RTI. The interaction of these individuals and the associated dynamics were key components in the development of the school culture. The following describes some of the individuals and their views on RTI.

Special education supervisor for Tahquamenon Area Schools. Bridget Newcomb spoke for an hour, enthusiastically describing the district and RTI. She shared that she is from Newberry and has been employed with the district for ten years. She was formerly the middle school resource room teacher and more recently an administrator. Bridget described the decision to implement RTI as one of timing. She explained that one summer some of the staff went to Chicago with the elementary principal to observe a PBIS program. When they returned, they made the decision that they needed to implement both RTI and PBIS.
The staff came together to work for two days to design a schedule that would allow for tiered levels of support through RTI. Bridget sounded proud of the fact that “every elementary teacher was involved except for two who had prior commitments.” When asked to describe the school culture, Bridget said they are a fairly “cohesive group” and there “isn’t a lot of drama.” She further stated that, “a large percentage of them are local; either graduating from here or marrying someone. We spend time with each other outside of work.” Further conversation led to comments regarding philosophical differences on inclusion, with Bridget describing some staff as “older teachers” who like routine and view the books as the curriculum, and “newer teachers” who seemed more open to change. She also identified a difference with Peg Cobb, the elementary principal, who Bridget said “feels inclusion is a burden on the teachers, but the teachers don’t feel this way.” Bridget elaborated that Peg can retire in three years and most of her career has involved special education that consisted of a traditional view of pull-out services and that the district had three self-contained classrooms.

Bridget shared that Abbie Wallis, the Superintendent, has been very supportive of RTI, due to her background as the district’s previous Special Education Supervisor. Bridget described Abbie as a “warm personality,” but went on to state that “she has a hard time making decisions.” Additionally, Bridget added there are times she felt there was a “lack of support” from the elementary principal.

Other difficulties included a recent change in staffing for the high school principal position. Brian, the previous principal, retired after 14 years, and the district hired Ken Doran. Bridget described Ken as having a very positive attitude and she felt the change was good, but said that others questioned his lack of teaching experience. Bridget went on to say that it was “subtle” but they (teachers) will “fire questions at him, and there is whispering.”
The superintendent. Abbie Wallis spoke about the implementation of RTI. She said that “Bridget and Peg had a lot to do with it, but Bridget wouldn’t think so.” Abbie stated further that “Peg has had a huge influence on the school culture.” Abbie also recounted how a small group went to Chicago to see a school that had implemented a Positive Behavior Interventions Support (PBIS) program, and when they came back, the staff wanted to do both RTI and PBIS. They worked on the scheduling that summer and formed two teams. Carey Suttor, the RTI Coordinator, heads the orange team for academics and Peg Cobb leads the black team for behavior.

Abbie had been with the district for 26 years and was able to offer some insight into historical and community factors. Abbie spent the majority of her career as the Special Education Supervisor before being asked to become the interim superintendent six years ago. After serving as the interim superintendent for a year, she accepted the position as superintendent, and Bridget Newcomb assumed the role of Special Education Supervisor.

Abbie described the school as having a “heavy union influence that is slowly deteriorating.” She described how she tries to involve staff in the decisions, which has helped. She explained that by helping them be involved in the School Improvement Process, they can look at all areas and set goals. In regard to RTI, she said, “Middle school is seeing the results, and they want to do that, whereas the high school staff are still hanging on to what they taught We have older staff who are traditional and want to be told what to do, whereas the newer staff want to be involved in the process.” When asked about community factors, Abbie commented,

You can’t have a state hospital for 100 years without a residual effect. People were released who couldn’t afford to move anywhere else so they stayed in the community.
At the same time, there was a mass exodus of professionals. While the prison has brought jobs to the area, it isn’t the same socio-economic level as before. Many of the correctional workers commute rather than live in the community and the jobs here are viewed as a stepping stone.

Abbie shared her experience as a community member, saying that Newberry is a “tight-knit community.” She said she “didn’t feel part of the community for a long time, even after being here for 26 years.” She said she “started to feel more of a sense of involvement as her kids grew up and were involved in school and sports. But even now, locals wouldn’t consider me local.”

**The RTI Coordinator.** Carey Suttor, the District’s RTI Coordinator, was not part of the initial group who went to Chicago and later provided the impetus to implement RTI and PBIS. Her position was created after they realized that they needed someone to run the Student Assistance Team meetings and provide services during Power Hour. Carey felt there was a lot of staff buy-in when deciding to implement RTI because teachers “were tired and frustrated by what they currently were doing, so they were ready.” There was an additional incentive of a stipend for the two work days, and staff was involved in the decision-making. The scheduling of Power Hour with existing staff was the biggest challenge, followed by other issues with progress-monitoring and assessments. Carey felt it was a rough transition initially but they weathered it by “venting and being a close knit group.”

Carey viewed her role as a “buffer,” especially initially, and “worked hard at listening carefully to understand. This makes it pretty easy to come to consensus” when making decisions. She said they had to scale back on some of their lofty goals and make adjustments
as necessary. To facilitate this process, she scheduled an in-service at the end of each marking period to review progress or provide additional training to staff.

When asked about school leadership, Carey said there was “not much connection with Peg, but that she checks in frequently with Abbie and works closely with Bridget.” She said she had the freedom to make decisions on her own and was solely responsible for the in-service days and running the program. She said their goal was to increase RTI beyond k-5 and that “middle School and high school want it to be a reality.” She was currently working on a report for the school board regarding the effectiveness of RTI in their district.

When asked about school culture, Carey reported a positive school climate saying the staff were “close in age and friends; spending time outside of work.” Further, she thought this was “how they have gotten through the tough times.” This sense of teamwork extended to issues outside of the school, with Carey sharing how the staff had picketed a few years ago when there were threats to close the prison. They knew this would be detrimental to the community and picketed to show their support.

*The teachers.* The teachers at Newberry Elementary are a dedicated group of professionals, who work hard to provide a quality education to the students in their district. Although they are united by a common goal, there are differences in their perceptions of the school culture, community factors, implementation of RTI, and school leadership. Nineteen teachers, administrators, support persons, and community members were interviewed and asked the same questions. The following sections introduce some of the respondents and their responses.
Mrs. Archer is a second grade teacher, who has spent most of her 20-year career at Newberry Elementary. She has a keen sense of how the community has influenced the school culture.

Prior to about 20 years ago, our community had a vibrant and active culture. We had businesses, the state mental hospital, and businesses that went with it. When the state hospital closed, the town went downhill very quickly. Businesses closed, and those that stayed had lower paying jobs or no jobs. Poverty became the norm.

Mrs. Archer shared that some of the teaching staff had attended a conference on professional learning communities or PLC’s and this led them to begin looking at RTI. She reported that “discussion happened, excitement multiplied, hard work happened, and RTI was born.” Although, she said, “School leadership has had little to do with either the conception or implementation of our RTI. It has been a teaching initiative, and our RTI coordinator is a teacher who has been very influential in our RTI program.” If anything, she believed “The administration is seen as somewhat hostile by most teachers. Some teachers work in an atmosphere of fear of the administration.” When asked about the school culture, Mrs. Hugo, one of the special education teachers, also began by describing the community and its impact on school culture.

With the downturn of the economy and change in the professional communities, the makeup of our children’s background changed. Fewer professionals live in our district. The socio-economic background of our families has changed over the last twenty years. More families need financial help and spend less time as a unit. Because of these factors, many of our students fall behind in their educational
progress. This was one of the main reasons the district choose to implement RTI and for the most part, the staff has been encouraged to fully take part in the process.

Mrs. Vining, one of the first grade teachers at Newberry stated, “I believe our school culture is one of being progressive. We have teachers who are looking out for the best interest of our students and do what it takes to accomplish this task. We have at times lacked the leadership from administration.” She shared her thoughts about where the impetus for implementing RTI came from.

...the climate of frustration of low test scores and students not learning the skills that are needed caused our staff to work to help them. We knew what we were doing was not working. The frustration was also that special education became a dumping group for students who didn’t fit the normal way of learning.

Mrs. Vining went on to say that “The superintendent has been very supportive and knows that RTI is a must and is working to implement it in the high school. The elementary principal has supported the program but hasn’t been in the work process of the details.”

Mrs. Bells, one of the fourth grade teachers, also described an “at-risk student population,” and the staff as “very willing to work together to implement programs that will benefit students...” Further, she said that they chose to implement RTI because there were “kids slipping through the cracks” and “eager teachers wanting to address weaknesses in current situation and low scores and to identify students early and avoid special education.” She believed that time and lack of resources were the main obstacles but the school leadership was “very supportive, encouraging,” but says their hands are tied when providing more resources. (See Appendix I for demographic information about the elementary staff at Newberry.)
Factors That Influenced the Implementation of RTI

The decision to implement RTI at Newberry Elementary occurred during the summer of 2010, when the elementary principal and a number of staff members attended training on Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) in Chicago. On their return, the group talked to Bridget Newcomb and others who were interested in implementing RTI. Although most districts wouldn’t consider implementing two new initiatives, the teachers at this school believed it was a necessity to implement both programs. One of the teachers, Mrs. Vining, shared that “The climate of frustration of low test scores and students not learning the skills they needed caused our staff to look at other ways to help them.” Mrs. Kerfoot stated,

Our high-poverty, low-functioning students led to the implementation of RTI in our district. We had in-services on PBIS and had staff members go and observe a school that had implemented RTI already. Those staff members came back and explained what they had seen at that school. We, as a staff, made an executive decision to start the two new programs that piggy-backed on one another. In my opinion, PBIS and RTI are two programs that are the same; one is for behavior and one is for academics. We considered all the options and decided that starting them both would be better for our school at that moment two years ago.

The shared realization that they needed to do something different resulted in administration and elementary staff coming together for two days to work on a schedule that allowed for a tiered system of academic and behavioral support. The basic premise of the RTI program at Newberry involves universal supports. All students are provided high quality instruction at the classroom level or Tier I. Teachers use universal screening quarterly to see which students are at risk of learning failure, and students are assigned based
on their needs. Students needing additional instruction receive small group instruction during Power Hour whereas those students who are at or above grade level are assigned an enrichment time. Staff uses progress monitoring to determine the level of assistance needed, with some students receiving daily Tier III instruction.

Participants in this study were interviewed over three days and asked what factors influenced the decision to implement RTI in their district. All of the staff interviewed were familiar with RTI and willing to answer the questions. The responses were categorized, and several themes emerged. Teachers at this school identified a total of 18 internal factors that influenced the decision to implement RTI. Eight teachers thought that RTI was viewed as preventative and necessary. Mrs. Bells, a fourth grade teacher, identified “kids slipping through the cracks and eager teachers wanting to address weaknesses in the current situation.” Mrs. Culver thought it was necessary to “find a standard way to reach kids who might not otherwise be successful,” and Mrs. Spanish believed that RTI was necessary and preventative due to concern over behavior with our students and how to document this in a consistent manner. We wanted to have a common behavior plan throughout our elementary and find a way to help those students who needed it most.

These teachers described the decision to implement RTI as staff-driven. Mrs. Earl, a kindergarten teacher, said, “We knew something different had to be done to help these children be successful.” Ms. Macintosh, one of the specials teachers, shared, “Our elementary staff has taken it upon themselves to make it work because it has to be done.” Ms. Sterling, a veteran third grade teacher, summed it by saying,

We were seeing a high number of students with special needs and those needs were not necessarily being met in the regular education setting. Our special education
numbers were increasing and we knew that what we were doing wasn’t working. It was then that our staff realized that we needed to work toward implementing a system where we could work more effectively to meet the needs of all students. We needed to change what we were doing.

Other positive responses included progress monitoring, PBIS, the RTI coordinator, and principal support. Mrs. Kerfoot said, “We needed a systematic approach to identify those students needing help with academics and behavior, the implementation of PBIS and progress monitoring helps us meet those needs.” Mrs. Vining thought the RTI coordinator was a strength stating, “We have a person in charge of RTI and this is her job. I think this has helped us teach Tier II and Tier III.” Mrs. Doran indicated the principal’s support was a positive factor stating, “Our principal has been on board with everything and has supported us,” and Mrs. Pringle reported “The principal is all for the implementation of RTI.”

Staff also identified 17 other factors that influenced the decision to implement RTI. Mrs. Nutkins and five other teachers identified “student need” and an “at-risk” population as external factors that influenced the decision to implement RTI. Mrs. Hugo explained that “Because of the lack of life-experiences, many of our students fall behind in their educational progress. Students unfortunately, have other things on their mind that detract from this process.” Mrs. Vining, a first grade teacher, responded by saying, “Frustration of students not making progress and not having things in place to assist them was the main factor. The idea was presented to staff at an in-service and we all got on board.”

Other staff identified low test scores, behavior issues, a high special education population, fewer staff members, and a decrease in funding as factors that influenced the decision to implement RTI. When asked what factors influenced the implementation of RTI,
Mrs. Kelly stated, “Trying to make due with less staff and funding, while also trying to reach high numbers of at-risk students” were factors that influenced the decision. Mrs. Picotte, identified several factors by saying that, “low income families, behavior issues, low scores, and a high special education population” influenced the decision to implement RTI.

In summary, the teachers at this school were able to identify a multitude of factors that influenced the decision to implement RTI. These factors provided the impetus to implement RTI at a time of decreasing resources. As Mrs. Archer said, “Our hope in starting RTI was to help our student population be more academically successful while also improving the behavior of students. We also needed to become more aware of our special education changes and the way those students were going to be identified and taught.” Mrs. Pringle also acknowledged that “our RTI model and process has not been without frustration. You find out what works and doesn’t and move forward with what does work, tweaking along the way.”

**Part three: history and culture of Newberry.** A historical perspective was gained through research at the public library located within the school and from interviews with staff and local residents. This information was useful for understanding the context in which the school and community exist. This background information is important because schools are an integral part of the community and the majority of staff interviewed identified community factors when asked what influenced the implementation of RTI.

*The Village of Newberry.* The history of rugged *pioneerism* has influenced the community and school culture and continues through present day. *The History of Luce County From Its Earliest Recorded Beginnings* (Luce Historical Society, 1995) described Newberry as a “multi-colored one of allegiance, loyalty and persistent enthusiasm” (p. 7).
This may also be an accurate description of the staff at Newberry Elementary who, despite a variety of obstacles, have implemented RTI and PBIS to support their students.

The area’s first settlers were the local Ojibwa with records showing that “old Chief Petoskey” sold the land, which is now Newberry, around August 28, 1890 (Luce Historical Society, 1995). Lumberman immigrated to the area with the development of a railroad between St. Ignace and Marquette, helping expand development of the area. The village was later named after John S. Newberry, an attorney and key developer of the village of Newberry.

In 1884, the school districts in Luce County were divided, and Newberry became a graded district. The residents built a new school in 1886, incurring $6,000 dollars of debt, and Professor Allan Krichbaum was hired as the first principal. At the time, the school had approximately 208 students. (Luce Historical Society, 1995). A new two story brick building was constructed in 1927 and expanded in the 1950s. The school continues to operate as a k-12 district today with a total enrollment of 765 students.

In 1882, the Vulcan Furnace Company for the manufacturing of charcoal iron was opened and remained until its closing in 1945. Mr. Claude W. Case was the manager of the Newberry Furnace Company, the former Vulcan Furnace Company. He was later instrumental in the construction of an insane asylum in the village of Newberry and served on the Board of Trustees for the Upper Peninsula Hospital (Decker, 2012)

In addition to the early lumbering, railroad, and other industries, the Village of Newberry has been home to a number of other state institutions. These state institutions have played an important role in the community from an economic and cultural standpoint.
Care of the poor and insane. Luce County, as did many other counties, established a poor house in 1876 that was administered by the Poor Commissioner. The poorhouse, like its counterpart in other counties, took care of paupers as well as the insane. This changed with Act 135 of the Public Acts of 1885 which made it illegal for any county superintendent of the poor to commit any insane person to the poorhouse (Decker, 2012). This was made possible by a shift in which the state began to provide for all of the insane wards of the state. The Poorhouse continued its care of paupers, whereas the insane were admitted to other state institutions.

The need for an asylum in the Upper Peninsula was expressed by several individuals throughout the state. Dr. James Dawson, the former Medical Superintendent at the Northern Michigan Asylum wrote that the four asylums in lower Michigan were all overcrowded. It was his opinion that there should be an asylum in the Upper Peninsula. He listed his reasons in an issue of the 1893 Marquette Mining Journal, that an asylum would alleviate the overcrowding in downstate facilities, reduce delays in admissions, help the recovery process, prevent individuals from being housed in county jails in direct violation of the statute, and reduce the cost of transporting an insane person from the Upper Peninsula to an asylum in the Lower Peninsula (Decker, 2012).

In 1893, the State House and Senate, in concurrence, passed legislation establishing the insane asylum. Act No. 210 of the Public Acts of 1893, authorized the construction of a fifth asylum for the Insane in the Upper Peninsula and appropriated $75,000 (Decker, 2012). Initially though, only Escanaba and Sault Ste. Marie submitted applications to the state’s committee for the construction of the asylum in their communities, and the state’s site committee sent letters to the newspapers in the Upper Peninsula in an effort to attract more
applicants. Many communities were slow to respond to the state’s proposal to construct an asylum due to the requirements requiring the host community to donate 400 acres, that the site have good drainage, access to fresh water, and be in a healthy and easily accessible part of the Upper Peninsula. That soon changed though due to the Depression. The mining and timber industries were impacted by the depressed economy, and the asylum was viewed as a stable industry. They following counties applied: St. Ignace, Sault Ste. Marie, Marquette, L’Anse, Ontonagon, Menominee, and Newberry (Decker, 2012).

John S. Newberry and Claude W. Case were instrumental in advocating for the Village of Newberry. After a fierce competition, Newberry was finally named the site for construction of the new facility (See Figure 2). In December 1883, the state’s site selection released its report citing the reasons why Newberry was chosen. The reasons given were that Newberry was serviced by four trains each day, had a 20-acre lake of pure spring water, and was an agricultural area that was bound to grow. Newberry contributed $6,000 and the Peninsula Land Company donated 560 acres of good farmland (Decker, 2012).

*Figure 2. The Upper Peninsula Hospital for the Insane*
The Upper Peninsula Hospital for the Insane. The hospital was established under Act No. 210, Public Acts of 1893. It originally appropriated funds for the construction of only two cottages and one industrial building. Cottages A, B, and C, were constructed out of red, pressed brick with a capacity of 50 patients each. Cottage A was reserved for the reception of male patients and Cottage C for female patients. The first floors had dayrooms and the second floors contained sleeping quarters. Cottage B was used as an Administration building. The basement served as the kitchen and dining room for the medical staff. The first floor contained the executive offices, dispensary, and business personnel. The Medical Superintendent and Assistant Medical Superintendent and their families occupied the second floor. Additionally, an occupational building containing a laundry, dining room, and sleeping apartments for the cook and other help were built in addition to a power house and barn.

The first patients arrived on November 4th, 1895, with a staff of 35. Thirty-two male patients and 22 female patients were transferred from the Northern Michigan Asylum at Traverse City to the Upper Peninsula to relieve the overcrowding there. An additional 81 patients were received from county jails around the Upper Peninsula and other places where they had been detained (Decker, 2012). In December, another 70 patients were received from the Northern Michigan Asylum in Traverse City and in January 1896, an additional 15 female patients relocated to the Upper Peninsula asylum.

Additions to the facility resulted in the construction of 20 cottage style buildings. The buildings were arranged in a quadrangle with 17 buildings designed for patient use, one administration building, an assembly hall, and a kitchen/dining hall. The Pavilion Plan
building style included covered walkways between buildings, which were arranged around an 11 acre square in the middle.

In December 1897, two new cottages were opened. Cottage D was built to serve 26 “disturbed females and 24 disturbed males” (Decker, 2012, p. 38.). Cottage E included two towers that were higher than the rest of the building to be used as an infirmary, designed for up to 60 patients. The first floor of the infirmary was used as the male hall and held offices where physical and mental examinations were conducted along with electrical treatments. The female patients resided on the second floor. The second tower was used as a pathological laboratory and had an elevator and operating rooms. Figure 3 shows a section of cottages included in the expansion of the state hospital.

Figure 3. Newberry State Hospital, Cottages O, P, and Q

Farming operations. In the fall of 1897 and the summer of 1898, grading and landscaping was done around buildings with trees planted along the driveway. Of the 560 acres of land belonging to the hospital, 145 acres were cleared, 123 acres were cultivated and
320 acres were enclosed by wire fencing. The asylum was similar to other state asylums and functioned as a self-contained community. Farming operations began in 1895 with a dairy farm and continued until 1957. Fruit trees and berry bushes were planted, and vegetables were grown and harvested. The asylum included an icehouse, store building, and garage, service building, cold storage and meat shop, bake shop, and creamery. The Amusement Hall opened in 1904 and contained a large stage with lights, dimmers, scenery, and seating for 200 people. The construction of additional cottages and buildings continued with the following opening dates: 1891: Cottages R and S opened for occupancy.

1900: Cottages P and Q opened for occupancy.

1902: Cottages O and N opened for occupancy.

1904: Cottage F opened for occupancy.

1904: Cottage M or the Amusement or Assembly Hall opened.

1906: Cottages K and L opened for occupancy.

1908: Cottage G was designated as the Administration Building.

In 1911, the name was changed to the “Newberry State Hospital” and it had 985 patients. On June 30, 1920, there were 1,037 patients, with an overcrowding of 52. The institution was a state-of-the-art facility with modern equipment and male and female receiving wards with separate kitchens and dining areas.

1939: New Administration Building opened with Cottage B for patients use.

Act No 142 of the Public Act of 1939 expanded the functions of the Newberry State Hospital to include the care and treatment of the mentally deficient. As a consequence, between the years of 1939-1941 a group of buildings designated as the Children’s Unit were added for the housing, care, and training of the feeble-minded children of the Upper
Peninsula. The children’s unit provided room for an additional four hundred patients. This complex consisted of an administration building, a small recreation room, six patient residences; three for male and three for female and a separate kitchen-dining room.

Although the buildings were on the same ground as those for the mentally ill, they were physically separated from them. The construction was similar in that cottages were connected with cloisters. Enclosed outdoor play yards were located between wards.

The training program at the Children’s Unit was to teach domestic tasks to the feeble-minded patients with a goal of getting them to work outside of the hospital. A school was built in 1955 and located north of Ward 1. It contained a swimming pool, with dressing rooms in the basement, a gymnasium, auditorium, nine classrooms including a kindergarten, other grades, speech therapy, occupational therapy, domestic science, and two multi-purpose rooms. The two multi-purpose rooms were used for clubs, recreation, religious classes, a library, and workshops. A beauty shop was available as well as a central broadcasting system.

By the 1960s most of the cottages and buildings had been remodeled and continued to house a large number of children and adults. A total of 1436 mentally ill patients resided at the Newberry State Hospital. The name was changed again in 1977 to the Newberry Regional Psychiatric Hospital.

*Sault Ste. Marie Hospital.* Even with the construction of multiple cottages, the Newberry State Hospital was overcrowded, and in 1944, the State Administrative Board approved a contract for leasing the Fort Brady Station Hospital at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, for use as an auxiliary state hospital to relieve the overcrowding. Eighteen buildings used by the Army for wards were converted into dormitories to accommodate 400-500 patients. The
facility was used for “mild, quiet, self-reliant or convalescent” patients and treatment would be limited to recreational and occupational therapy (Dexter, 2012, p. 49).

**Community mental health.** Things began to change in 1962 with the movement toward community mental health programs. Prior to this date, the state hospitals were the only option available and, at the time, there were 33,000 persons in the state hospital system. Today there are less than 2,000 (Decker, 2012). The community mental health movement was due in part to the high costs associated with institutionalized care and the concerns regarding the “widespread inhumane human warehousing” (Decker, 2012, p. 170). The focus in the 1960s was then to look at other options to de-institutionalize persons with mental illness and look for community-based programs. This was important because the state hospitals had evolved over the century to include the care of the elderly, the poor, oppressed and misunderstood minorities, and homeless individuals with no other means of support.

**Timeline of the Community Mental Health Movement, 1962 to 1963.** Under the Kennedy administration, Community Mental Health Centers were created and received federal support. A minimum population base of 100,000 people was required to receive funding. Marquette, Alger, and Delta Counties collaborated to meet the minimum population requirement and began providing services.

**Mid-1960s:** Michigan Public Act 54 was established and facilitated state funding of local mental health centers. At this time, outpatient clinic services were provided by social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists.

**1974:** Michigan Public Act 258 was established, creating Community Mental Health Boards. It clearly identified and separated the responsibilities of the Department of Social Services (DSS), State Hospitals, and Community Health Centers.
**Late 1970s:** Case management and residential services were transferred from the DSS to Community Mental Health Centers. Funds could be issued to the location where the consumer was living; thus, promoting local service for each consumer.

**Early 1980s:** Community Mental Health Centers became full-management agencies, accepting responsibility for all public funding for mental health services, including outpatient services, inpatient care, residential services, and case management.

Alger-Marquette Community Mental Health Center (now known as Pathways) was one of four state pilot boards for the Department of Mental Health's trial of full-management contracting. Newberry State Hospital patients continued to be placed into the community. To facilitate community living, day programs were established to help teach the needed skills to successfully adapt to community life for both the developmentally disabled and mentally ill populations.

**Mid-1980s:** Medicaid allowed for reimbursement of outpatient and partial day program services. Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) programs were established to provide case management services to the chronically mentally ill, and focused on community technology as opposed to institutional technology. ACT promoted skill development that would allow consumers to live as independently as possible.

**Late 1980s:** Coordinated Community Planning began to promote collaboration among agencies and more efficient use of resources.

**Late 1990s:** Fifteen final patients from the Newberry State Hospital are placed into the community. In 1992, the Newberry State Hospital closed.

**Community perception of the Newberry State Hospital.** Betsey Lewis is a retired art teacher who volunteers at the public library located within the school. When I was
researching the community, Betsey introduced herself as a “poverty senior.” She shared that she is a grandparent of a special needs child and was interested in hearing about the implementation of RTI at Newberry. During the conversation, she shared the profound impact the closing of the mental hospital had on the community, saying,

We had a state-of-the-art facility for close to a hundred years, and when that closed sixteen or seventeen years ago, it had a huge economic impact on the community. The professionals moved out and we got the prison community instead. It’s not that I’m ungrateful; it is just not the same caliber.

Other individuals shared how the history of the mental hospital influenced the perception of individuals in neighboring communities. Joel Forrester, a forty-something construction worker from the neighboring community of Sault Ste. Marie, shared that when he was a student at school in Sault Ste. Marie, students used to tease each other and use the phrase Newberry to represent someone who was crazy. It also was common to hear of or know individuals with mental health issues that were often “taken to Newberry” for in-patient services.

Jami Rorick, a school social worker in Sault Ste. Marie, who grew up in Newberry remembers visiting the Newberry Psychiatric Hospital as a child. Jami’s grandmother worked at the hospital as the switchboard operator for the phone system and Jami would often get dropped off on Saturday nights to spend time with her. Jami thought the hospital grounds and buildings looked like something out of a movie and she would often bring her dolls to play with or use the chalkboard while her grandmother worked. She had some contact with the patients, as her grandmother referred to them, and became fond of a lady named “Gladys” who often came to visit her when she was there.
At the time, Jami didn’t think these visits were anything out of the ordinary, but there were a few times she saw patients being escorted while wearing a strait-jacket or were agitated. Many of the parents of Jami’s friends worked at the Newberry Psychiatric hospital and held high ranking, professional positions. Things changed abruptly though when she was in ninth grade and the hospital closed. Some of her friends moved away with their parents to Marquette or Midland to accept other professional positions and the community changed. While these professionals left, there were patients who were released who began to reside in group treatment homes or live independently in the community. These individuals often had colorful names such as “Pop-can Phil” or “Crazy Patchy” and she wasn’t really sure what their real names were.

Jami described the rest of her high school experience as normal, but stated that it seemed like the same teachers had been there for years and were often people who grew up in the community. Following high school graduation, Jami attended Michigan State University and was surprised at times to hear people use the phrase Newberry stare to describe someone with a vacant, blank look. These kinds of comments made her realize the unique experience of living in close proximity to a psychiatric hospital and how it influenced the community.

The Newberry Correctional Facility. The community suffered a huge economic blow when the Newberry State Hospital closed. This impact was softened in 1995 when the western part of the hospital was used to build the Newberry Correctional Facility, a medium security state prison shown in Figure 4.
The prison officially opened in January 26, 1996, and has been called the Newberry Correctional Facility, Newberry Correctional Center, or Newberry Medium Security Prison. The facility was designed for Level I low and Level II low-to-medium security prisoners.

The correctional facility consists of ten units that were renovated to accommodate up to 80 prisoners each. Two were ready for occupancy and 40 prisoners arrived the opening day. The Level II prison eventually held 800 prisoners who had been convicted of a variety of felonies. Forty prisoners were transferred each week until it reached capacity.

Shown in Figure 5, the prison’s security perimeter includes two parallel 16-foot fences with rolls of razor-ribbon wire, and electronic detection and sensor system and a camera monitoring system. (State of Michigan, 2011).
Within its perimeter are the housing units, food services, programming (education, religious services, library, recreation, barber shop, and volunteer and counseling programs. Outside the secured perimeter are the administration, warehouse, maintenance buildings, and an employee weight room (Michigan Department of Corrections, ND).

The prison is laid out in a horseshoe arrangement, as shown in Figure 6, with a visiting room, deputy’s suite, control tower, and an information desk located near the entrance. A hallway leads to five of the housing units, which are similar to military bunkhouses with bunk beds and narrow lockers at each end. The hallway continues to the kitchen and dining hall and five more housing units before it ends at the program building.

The program building also houses the chapel, library, gymnasium, and school. The main function of the school is to offer inmates an opportunity to receive General Education Development education or GED.

*Figure 5. Newberry Correctional Facility’s perimeter fencing.*
The Newberry Correctional Facility houses 903 male prisoners and has a staff of more than 300, adding $28 million a year to the local economy (Hunt, 2011). While the correctional facility has helped the local economy, it creates a less than inviting first glimpse of the community. It also serves a different role in the community since many of the correctional workers commute rather than reside in the community. This is distinctly different than the Newberry State Hospital staff, who often resided on site and were often referred to as “family.”

![Aerial View of the Newberry Correctional Facility](image)

**Figure 6.** Aerial View of the Newberry Correctional Facility

**Staff perception of community and historical factors.** When staff were asked to describe the community or historical factors that influenced the development of your school culture, over forty different responses were provided. The responses fell into three broad categories; economic, family, and geographic location.
The category with the largest number of responses was economic factors with seven teachers indicating the closing of the state hospital was the main factor that influenced the development of their school culture. Mrs. Vining responded by saying the “closing of the state hospital in the 90s took away our professional jobs; closing of many stores takes money out of our community. People on staff don’t even support our local business.” Mrs. Kerfoot agreed by saying, “The closing of the state hospital caused many of the professionals and their families to move away. This left our community with a large amount of low income families who depend on state support.” Mrs. Archer summed it up by saying,

Prior to about 20 years ago, our community had a vibrant and active culture. We had businesses, the state mental hospital and all the businesses that went with it. When the state hospital closed, the town went downhill very quickly. Businesses closed, population left and those that stayed had lower paying jobs or no jobs. Poverty became the norm.

Mrs. Culver, Mrs. Hugo, and five other teachers indicated that having few professional or middle-class employers was an important community issue that influenced school culture. Mrs. Culver shared, “We are in an area of low socio-economic status. We have many families in poverty or without professional jobs.” Mrs. Hugo identified, “Our school district is made up of many students (who) come from poverty situations, and we have very few jobs that allow for a middle class. Therefore, a large population of our school is lower-achieving.” Mrs. Walton said, “There are only a few major employers in the area and of those, only the school and hospital have professionals.”

Other staff identified the economic recession and decrease in school funding as factors that influenced their school culture. Mrs. Nutkins reported the “recession” as the
main factor influencing school culture, whereas Mrs. Kelly identified cuts in funding and “trying to do more with less” as influencing their school culture. Mrs. Sully reported, “We do not have many middle jobs in our community. Poverty plays a role in how we deal with situations.”

Staff also identified environmental factors or family issues as influences on school culture. Nine teachers felt that students living in poverty and not having their basic needs met influenced the school culture. Mrs. Vining reported, “The majority of students come from families that are in poverty or close to poverty.” Ms. Sterling said, “We live in a high poverty area with many students on free or reduced lunch.” Mrs. Bells elaborated, saying, “The atmosphere of our school has changed over the past two decades. More children come to school dependent on the services we provide. More students require assistance with basic school supplies. Often they are less prepared for beginning kindergarten.”

Six teachers felt environmental issues surrounding families influenced the school culture. These responses pointed to single parent homes, parents working different shifts, parents not being able to meet their child’s basic needs, or holding different values in regard to education. Mrs. Walton described an “at-risk student population, student concerns of safety and lack of food,” and Ms. Sterling stated that the “high poverty area leads to problems with educational values.” When asked what factors influenced the school culture, Mrs. Archer responded by saying, “We have a student population with a high level of poverty. Students have many home issues that play into their ability and or motivation to learn.”

Other teachers identified at-risk students and the prison population as having an influence on school culture. Ms. Sterling said “the prison in the area leads to family
members of those inmates moving in and out of our area.” Mrs. Hugo reported “few professionals in the area,” whereas Mrs. Sully said “the prison….plays a key role in our community.” Mrs. Earl, a kindergarten teacher stated,

> We live in a rural, high poverty area. Our students typically come from families with little to no education and don’t understand or support it. They are unemployed and living on the government dole. Many families would rather diagnosis their child with ADHD because it is easier.

The final category of community or historical factors that influenced school culture was geographic location. Newberry is a village in a rural location without a single stoplight and no other towns within a 60 mile radius. The next closest town is Sault Ste. Marie, 60 miles to the East or Munising, approximately 60 miles West. This remote location results in students and families being unable to locate resources and support available elsewhere. Staff are also forced to be self-reliant. Mrs. Sully noted, “We are a rural area with a large majority of at-risk students.” Mrs. Pringle, a first grade teacher, noted, “Often times, families have a very small if non-existent support group and their main goal is not always education, but instead merely providing the basic needs for their family.”

This remote location also puts the district at an economic disadvantage due to the sparse population and large geographic area. Luce County has 7.7 people per square mile with the district covering over 1900 square miles, resulting in a larger percentage of its annual budget for transportation than any district east of the Mississippi (Hunt, 2011).

This awareness of economic and social issues impacting students’ home life and academic achievement led to staff awareness of the need to change what they were doing. As with many rural communities that are not able to access support elsewhere, this led to
increased self-reliance. Similar to the rugged pioneers from the previous decades, the staff at Newberry are used to being self-reliant and are cognizant of the mutual interdependence with the community. Mrs. Kerfoot noted, “Our school has many low income families. Our staff know the struggle these children have in the school setting.” Mrs. Walton said “The teaching staff is very willing to work together to implement programs that will benefit students.” Mrs. Sully went on to say, “We tend to embrace change in a positive manner when we can see the benefits for our students. We work together well and do well without administrator’s guidance.” When asked about RTI, Ms. Macintosh stated, “Our elementary staff has taken it upon themselves to make it work because it had to be done.”

The historical information regarding the community is important because schools are a microcosm of the communities in which they reside. This information is also important because the culture of a school develops slowly over time as a result of the way the members deal with internal and external issues. It is through this process that norms are established for the group (Owen, 1995). Schein (1992) described culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions the group learned as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that worked well enough to be considered valued” (p. 12).

Although schools share numerous common elements, each school culture is unique. To understand a group of people, one must understand the contextual elements that influence individual and institutional behavior (Schein, 1992). The village of Newberry has a unique history of rugged pioneerism and an interdependent relationship with state institutions which has influenced the development of the school culture.

**Part four: organizational issues with RTI.** Schools are very conservative institutions resistant to change, with some researchers viewing school culture as the “missing
link” (Wagner, 2006). The culture of the school affects the priorities and how and when decisions are made. Part Four will describe the organizational issues associated with implementation of RTI. These include issues of curriculum, changing roles and responsibilities of personnel, schedules, and allocation of resources as a result of the implementation of RTI.

RTI represents a significant paradigm shift in which students exhibiting learning difficulties are initially provided instructional assistance in the general education setting (Fuchs, et. al., 2007; Jimerson, et. al., 2007). Although there are many benefits of a RTI approach, this shift requires a change in basic beliefs about special education, changing roles and responsibilities and other organizational issues. Evidence of this paradigm shift was noted in artifacts, observations and staff interviews. One of the main reasons Newberry has been successful in implementing RTI in their district is the staff’s awareness that what they were doing wasn’t working and that they needed to do more to meet their students’ needs.

Mrs. Archer reported, “Several years ago, our school professional development’s focus was on behaviors and academic concerns. We had not passed AYP and knew that we needed to do something.” Mrs. Earl, one of the kindergarten teachers, said, “We knew that something different had to be done to help these children be successful and hopefully college ready. If families weren’t capable of this, we stepped up and became mentors, teachers, and parents to our children.”

When the staff at Newberry were asked to describe their school culture, several descriptors emerged. Nineteen elementary teachers were interviewed; the majority of staff first identified external factors as having influenced their school culture. There were a total of 26 responses. Eight teachers identified at-risk students and eight identified low socio-
economic level for families when asked to describe their school culture. Mrs. Kelly said, “We have a large majority of at-risk students,” and Mrs. Kerfoot said, “Our school has many low income families.” Mrs. Vining responded by saying, “Lower socio-economic families and few professional parents” were factors that influenced their school culture.

Other responses included high unemployment, declining enrollment, increasing class sizes, teachers resistance to change, bullying among students, and lack of time during the day. Mrs. Archer reported, “We have a student population with a high level of poverty. Students have many home issues that play into their ability and/or motivation to learn. There is some issue with bullying.” Many teacher identified multiple factors when asked to describe their school culture. Mrs. Nutkins responded, “at risk, high poverty level, and high unemployment, classroom sizes increasing, and enrollment decreasing.”

Only one internal factor, school leadership, was identified by five teachers as having a negative impact on the school culture. Mrs. Walton believed there was “a lack of leadership,” and Mrs. Kerfoot agreed, saying there was “the lack of administrative support” when it came to the actual implementation of RTI. Mrs. Hugo shared, “Even though we have a lack of leadership, our elementary has worked hard together to develop and implement new programs.” Mrs. Earl concurred,

Often times our administration waits until the last second to give staff important details or they don’t tell us anything at all. It is mid-April and they haven’t begun to discuss next year’s budget, leaving many staff members uneasy and wondering where they will be next year. I enjoy working with many of the people on staff, but the administration concerns me.
When asked to describe the school culture at Newberry, the majority of staff initially identified community factors. Ms. Sterling was typical; she began by sharing community factors.

We live in a high poverty area with many students on free and reduced lunch. Our teachers try to stay on top of new programs that are on the move into our school. We try to stay ahead of the game as much as possible. Our percentage of professional families is not nearly as large as compared to the percentage of high poverty students. This response was a common theme, with the majority of teachers identifying community factors when asked about their school culture. Mrs. Vining, Mrs. Nutkins, and Mrs. Kerfoot indicated “lower socio-economic families, 50% of kids on free and reduced lunch, few professional parents, and few parents with full time jobs.” A total of 16 teachers reported “at-risk students, low socio-economic level or students living in poverty” as influencing school culture.

There were 22 more responses describing the school culture, with eight teachers indicating they have a “positive and caring” staff and five teachers identifying collaboration or teamwork. Mrs. Welton, a fourth grade teacher, who has been with the district 11 years stated, “Teachers at this school are caring and work together to make the best possible choices for the students in our building in meeting standards and behavior issues.” Other responses included “more positive relationships with students through PBIS, staff relationships with each other, staff being “on-board” with RTI, after school activities, and parents who try to be involved. Mrs. Carnes described a “collaborative and proactive teaching staff” while Mrs. Earl reported, “most teachers are on board with RTI.” Mrs. Vining shared, “many families who work hard and try to do the best they can” and “many
after school opportunities for kids.” This was a common theme with 13 teachers who identified characteristics of the staff as positive influences on school culture. These responses also described the staff as hard-working, caring, pro-active, or in terms that indicated collaboration or teamwork.

The staff seemed to be cognizant of how the changing economy had a negative impact on student learning. Veteran staff, and staff who grew up in the community, were more likely to share community and environmental factors as influencing school culture. This was evident in their responses and a common theme; many teachers indicated that they either grew up in Newberry or were married to someone who graduated from Newberry. This finding was so common that it led me to investigate the percentage of staff who were either graduates of Newberry Schools or were married to a graduate of Newberry Schools. A review of the staff roster indicated that Newberry has a significantly high proportion of their staff meeting this criteria, with 35 of the 77 employees (45.5%) described as “locals.” This high percentage of staff who graduated from Newberry or who were married to a graduate gave evidence of a strong sense of community and that the “tight-knit group” is an influence on school culture.

**Obstacles to the implementation of RTI.** The decision to implement RTI was not without challenges. Staff gave 33 different responses about the biggest obstacles to the implementation of RTI. These responses were categorized, with several themes emerging. Nine teachers viewed scheduling and time for instruction as the main obstacle. Mrs. Vining shared concerns about “scheduling time to meet with children in Tier III and not enough time to meet with children” for instruction. Mrs. Walton expressed concern about “trying to find time to squeeze in other subjects with less time due to Power Hour.” Mrs. Hugo expressed
concern about “scheduling time in the day for Tier III students to meet.” Mrs. Archer agreed saying, “in the beginning, time to implement it, now a loss of that extra 45 to 60 minutes that is taken out of the classroom teaching to have Power Hour.”

Additionally, eight staff responded that time to meet as a staff or lack of prep time were obstacles. Mrs. Nutkins said, “The time to meet as a staff and be on the same page” was a concern, and Mrs. Walton and Mrs. Culver were concerned with “time to plan.” Mrs. Archer expressed concern about “finding time to plan for Power Hour activities” and “finding time to fill out progress monitoring materials.” Mrs. Sully shared, “the biggest obstacle has been the time I have spent preparing lessons and grading the Power Hour activities as well as ensuring I have all of the progress monitoring complete.”

Mrs. Kerfoot elaborated, saying,

Scheduling is a nightmare. There are times when staff members have to step up and take one for the team. For example, the fourth grade group has their specials at two different times of the day. Next year this won’t be the case. Lunches get changed every year. Special education is always a problem, making sure each student gets their appropriate amount of time per their Individual Education Plan (IEP).

These concerns were a result of the need to use existing staff to provide services for Tier II and III, which meant six teachers including classroom teachers, the RTI coordinator, and specials teachers had to provide additional support for struggling students or the enrichment group. Scheduling and contractual issues ensued because staff are entitled to a 50 minute uninterrupted prep time. These obstacles were overcome by staff who agreed to split their prep time to allow for Power Hour, with the understanding that it would not be the same teachers each year.
Six staff members indicated that a lack of resources, including staff, as the main obstacle. Mrs. Kelly reported “we do not have enough teachers, especially in the upper elementary to be able to reach all the students.” Mrs. Doran agreed saying, “the amount of resources has been an obstacle, including (having) enough teachers to implement.” Mrs. Bells expressed concern about “lack of resources, more staff needed to create smaller groups,” and Mrs. Hugo identified “resources for Tier III students.”

In addition to scheduling, time for instruction and lack of resources, other staff responses included the need for clearer guidelines for new initiatives, lack of leadership, and “staff willingness or lack of it.” Mrs. Bell identified “parent questions and understanding” of RTI whereas Mrs. Derushe identified two different issues: “dealing with personalities that aren’t as flexible as others” and “administrators lack of support sometimes on issues or ability to be in sessions when their decision ability needs to be there.” Mrs. Earl, a kindergarten teacher summed it up by saying,

Time and money…we are short staff, resources, and administration that even knows what we do on a day to day basis. Our principal is not here today as she has taken a personal day to see her ill daughter. I feel very bad that her daughter was hurt but I feel that she needs to be here on a day that some big decisions need to be made concerning common core especially given the fact that our leadership is lacking and that they push the load on the staff yet we are unable to make major decisions and they get the credit.

Despite these challenges, the staff was overwhelmingly positive with their follow up comments stating that, “despite the challenges, the program is beneficial” and “our staff has worked incredibly hard to implement RTI.”
**Part five: leadership.** “Although much has been written about school reform in the last decade, insufficient attention has been given to the importance of relationships among the adults within the school” (Barth, 1990, p. xiv). Barth asserted that the individual school is a promising unit for analysis, with research stressing the importance of strong leadership. This research carefully examined the relationships among the staff at Newberry Elementary School and the role of school leadership.

School leadership was a common theme throughout the staff interviews. Teachers were asked to describe how school leadership influenced the implementation of RTI. There were 33 responses regarding school leadership. Twelve teachers felt the decision to implement RTI was supported by school leaders. Mrs. Walton said, “They have given us the time to make it happen and certain members have been helpful.” Mrs. Sterling said, “Our administrators are supportive of our work,” and Mrs. Nutkins shared, “We have been fortunate that administration has allowed us the opportunity to move ahead and be proactive before a mandatory timeline was implemented.” Other staff noted that “Administration is supportive of RTI and gives us the time, but says their hands are tied when it comes to resources.”

Three teachers specifically identified the RTI Coordinator as having a positive influence on the implementation. Mrs. Kelly said the RTI Coordinator “has taken this program and really made it easy for us. She has done a great job.” Mrs. Vining identified the superintendent as being involved in the implementation of RTI by saying “The superintendent has been very supportive and knows that RTI is a must and is working to implement it in the higher grades.” Two teachers felt the school leadership supported RTI by providing staff with time to provide services; two teachers indicated there was support by
administrators through the in-service days specific to RTI. Mrs. Sully, a fifth grade teacher, said:

Our administration has been very supportive in the implementation of this program. We have monthly meetings to review and make decisions for our PBIS program based on actual data – not what we are thinking. We have a teacher who is in charge of RTI and is able to assist in making sure we can be successful.

Nine teachers had concerns about school leadership and implementation of RTI. Seven teachers felt that administration had little involvement with the implementation of RTI or lacked awareness. Mrs. Kelly said, “Our school leaders had very little influence on the implementation of RTI. That is something we as a staff have taken on with basically no direction from administration.” Mrs. Doran, one of the second grade teachers, said the school leadership was “not much help at all; not able to answer questions or help when needed. They just redirect us to the Black Team for RTI.” Additionally, two teachers felt the decision-making by school leaders resulted in a lack of resources which had a negative impact on the implementation of RTI.

While there were varying responses from teachers regarding school leadership, it was important to distinguish between responses that viewed school leadership in general and those that distinguished between particular administrators. This was important because the implementation of RTI involved the elementary principal, special education coordinator, RTI coordinator and superintendent. As described earlier, most staff felt the administration supported the decision to implement RTI but were not always directly involved. These broad responses referred to administration being “supportive” and “encouraging” in regard to the implementation of RTI but that they lacked detail. More specific and positive responses
related to the RTI Coordinator, who was directly involved in and responsible for the program, with the superintendent also being identified as being supportive. Mrs. Kerfoot reported, “The teachers in our school as well as our RTI Coordinator lead the implementation of RTI.” Mrs. Archer said, “Our RTI Coordinator, who was a teacher, has been very influential in our RTI program.” Mrs. Vining, one of the first grade teachers, summed it up by saying, “The superintendent has been very supportive and knows that RTI is a must and is working to implement it in the high school.”

However, most staff felt that the elementary principal, while supportive, was mostly uninvolved in the implementation of RTI. Mrs. Kerfoot said the teachers and RTI coordinator have taken the lead in the RTI program, and noted, “Our school principal doesn’t sit in our on in-services, or RTI meetings and therefore, doesn’t understand the program as well as the staff.” Mrs. Vining added, “The elementary principal has supported the program but hasn’t been in the work process of the details.” It is unclear though if the elementary principal’s lack of involvement was the norm or if it was due to recent absences which included the dates of the on-site data collection. Additional attempts to interview her were not possible, and she retired at the conclusion of the 2011-2012 school year.

Summary

This study examined how the culture of one elementary school influenced the implementation of RTI. As more districts move to implement RTI, this becomes an important issue because many school reform efforts are initially implemented, but never become fully ingrained in school culture (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This qualitative study examined the school culture at Newberry Elementary School using Schein’s three levels of culture (2010) as the conceptual framework. Data were collected during the 2011-2012
school year and included the collections of artifacts, observations, and interviews of teachers and administrators.

These data confirmed the successful implementation of RTI at Newberry Elementary. Artifacts were visible throughout the building and there was evidence of RTI on the school website, budget information, schedules for Power Hour, and in-service days. Multiple staff members were observed on site, and this information helped to verify the wide-spread implementation of RTI. In addition to the RTI coordinator and special education staff, general education staff were involved in and familiar with the implementation of RTI. Many staff members helped by providing services during Power Hour. In addition to the observations, every staff member who participated in interviews was aware of and could describe RTI.

Interviews provided the most persuasive evidence of espoused values and insight into basic underlying assumptions. Three administrators and 19 teachers were asked the same questions using the protocol in the Interview Guide. Subjects were asked to describe their school culture, the factors that have influenced the implementation of RTI in their district, community or historical factors that influenced the development of school culture, the biggest obstacles to the implementation of RTI, and how school leadership has influenced the implementation of RTI. The data were then analyzed and several themes emerged.

When the staff at Newberry described their school culture, it was interesting to note that the majority of staff first used external factors to describe their school culture. These were things they had no control over but felt influenced their school culture. Responses included issues such as an at-risk student population, students living in poverty, and unemployment. Staff also provided a variety of positive factors, primarily internal factors
such as a collaborative or caring staff being proactive and hard-working. I believed that it was significant that the staff was aware of external factors and how these factors influenced school culture. Resiliency among the staff was also noted in their ability to identify positive factors that could be described as an internal locus of control. Their comments included terms such as *collaboration*, *teamwork*, and “the decision to implement RTI as necessary, and something that needed to be done for students.” The staff was resilient due to these comments and their positive attitude at a time when there were lay-offs and budget cuts.

When the staff described community or historical factors that influenced the development of their school culture, there were areas of concern. These were primarily external factors including “economic factors,” “environmental or family factors,” and “community.” Seven staff members were quick to identify the closing of the state hospital as a factor, and seven staff members noted that having few professional families or middle-class employers were factors in their school culture. Other factors included students living in poverty and not having their basic needs met and that families reside in a rural community, making it difficult to access resources. These teachers were very aware of the history of the community and how the closing of the state hospital and later the prison influenced their school culture.

When the staff described factors that influenced the implementation of RTI in their district, they reported their students’ needs as the main reason for the implementation of RTI. The 17 responses focused primarily on an awareness of student need, a high special education population, having to do more with less funding, and low test scores. Staff provided other more positive responses, including things they have control over such as the fact that staff were aware that RTI was necessary, that staff were eager, and were involved in
the decision to implement RTI. The decision to implement RTI was not without challenges; the staff was asked to discuss obstacles. Responses identified scheduling, sufficient planning time, and lack of resources, including staff, as an obstacle. Despite these challenges, the teachers at this school perceived RTI as a positive decision.

Research showed that school leaders play a crucial role in shaping school culture and, therefore, have a profound effect on the organization’s ability to grow and change (Newmann, 1996). The staff at Newberry Elementary was asked how school leadership influenced the implementation of RTI. The majority of responses were positive, indicating that administration was supportive, especially the RTI coordinator and superintendent. Although the majority of staff reported that administration was supportive, some staff would have liked more direct involvement from administration. These responses illustrated the staff’s belief in collaboration and teamwork.

The school culture at Newberry Elementary school is unique in several ways, due in part to the community and historical factors, often identified by staff when asked to describe their school culture. The history of the community of Newberry is unusual in its unique, symbiotic relationship with state institutions. The presence of and changes in state institutions led to changes to the demographic make-up of the school population, the staff’s awareness of students unmet needs, and the impetus for a staff-driven decision to implement RTI. This decision was consistent with the school culture that embraces collaboration and teamwork. Even the role of school leadership was positive, with the only real negative concerns expressing a desire for elementary principal to be more directly involved.
Educators have wrestled for many years with the issue of how to define learning disabilities and who should be served under that classification. In the last few decades the number of students identified with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) has grown prodigiously, yet criticism of the current method of determining eligibility continues to increase (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Hale, 2008). National education associations and other sponsoring groups have provided recommendations for alternate methods of determining eligibility and for improving the educational performance of students with learning disabilities (Jimerson et al., 2007; President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). The Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) shifted the focus away from a discrepancy approach to alternate methods of identification such as Response To Intervention or RTI, which encompasses a process for evaluating whether students respond to high quality classroom instruction and evidence-based interventions as expected. RTI is a multi-tiered, prevention-intervention system with successive levels of instructional support for students who don’t make adequate progress in comparison to their peers (Strecker et al., 2008).

Research is supportive of a RTI approach, but does not offer as much information about what this process looks like or about successful implementation. This knowledge is important inasmuch as the implementation of RTI requires comprehensive, school-wide reform to develop and sustain the use of data and instructional practices (Danielson et al., 2007). Barth (1990) noted that successful implementation of RTI is a challenge because schools tend to be very conservative institutions and often resistant to change. Thus, school
culture is a factor worth examining, as it dictates what is of value for a particular group and how and when decisions are made. This study examined school culture and how it influenced a system that implemented RTI as a new initiative.

School culture develops slowly over time as a result of the way the members deal with internal and external issues. Schein (1992) described culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions the group learned as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that worked well enough to be considered valued” (p. 12). Culture is a multi-faceted phenomenon, which is not easily understood. Therefore, Schein’s (2010) three levels of organizational culture were used as the conceptual framework for this study. Schein advised that it is best to think about organizational culture in artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. An overview of the study, summary of the research methods, discussion of the findings and implications, and recommendations for further research are included in this chapter.

**Overview of the Study**

This study investigated how the culture of an organization influenced the implementation of RTI in a school. It examined issues corresponding to change within a system, with particular attention to those relating to school culture. A qualitative, ethnographic approach was used to gather data, including the collection of artifacts, observations, and interviews. These methods were chosen because an in-depth study of one school and the relationships between staff would provide the opportunity to identify the basic underlying assumptions, which Schein (2010) described as the hidden level of culture.

Data were initially collected from nine intermediate school districts and several professional organizations to select the school that best met the parameters of the study.
These contacts were helpful in gauging the extent to which RTI was being implemented throughout Michigan. All potential sites were contacted by email with follow up phone conversations to determine if the district met the criteria as outlined in the study and to gauge the level of administrative support for ongoing data collection if selected. After a thorough search, Newberry Elementary, a small rural school in the District of Tahquamenon Area Schools in Luce County, Michigan, was selected as the site that met the criteria and was willing to participate.

Once Newberry was selected as the site, arrangements were made with the Special Education Coordinator, and research was conducted in the 2011–2012 school year. Data collection consisted of multiple measures, including the collection and review of artifacts, observations, and formal and informal interviews. These methods were selected to allow for the in-depth study of one school and focused on the staff, school culture, and implementation of RTI. Interviews were conducted with three administrators and 19 elementary teachers. Data were organized using Schein’s (2010) three levels of organizational culture as the conceptual framework to determine how the school culture influenced the implementation of RTI.

Newberry Elementary was a rich site for this study. Not only did it meet all of the criteria set for the study, but the staff members were eager to describe their school culture and share their experience in implementing RTI. In addition to the observations and interviews, excellent artifacts were available regarding the school and unique community history, providing a historic perspective that further supported interviews and observations.

This study found that school culture played an integral role in the way decisions were made, especially in regard to the implementation of new initiatives such as RTI. Whereas
each school’s culture is unique and affects how and when decisions are made, the culture at Newberry Elementary is unusual by the extent to which it has been influenced by community and historical factors. The staff and their relationships with each other were also a determining factor in the implementation of RTI.

An ethnographic case study imposes certain limitations. In this study, the greatest restriction was that only one school was used and thoroughly investigated. The data reflected the unique context and RTI program at this school; thus, the results of this study are not generalizable to other schools or programs. This study was conducted in a relatively short period of time and is further limited by this timeframe.

The primary source of data in this study was interviews with staff. While these interviews provided a rich source of data into the staff’s perception of how school culture influenced the implementation of Response to Intervention, a variety of approaches were needed to ensure “trustworthiness.” Participation in the study was voluntary, participants did not receive any compensation and were observed in a variety of settings. Participants were not supervised by the researcher and the researcher had no reason to believe the responses were anything but accurate and truthful. Triangulation and other approaches were used to increase the validity of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998); however, even then there is the possibility there may be things that were not revealed.

The teachers at this school provided a unique historical perspective on the community, state institutions, and school culture. The analysis of the data, which reflects the expressed viewpoints of the staff, limits validity of the findings to the extent that these data are accurate and complete. Likewise, this study investigated school culture at one school. It
did not investigate all issues or variables associated with culture. It is therefore limited to the extent that these data are complete and accurate.

**Findings**

Four findings emerged from the investigation of the relationship between school culture and the implementation of RTI: (1) Schools are a microcosm of the community, (2) RTI affects the whole school, (3) Leadership influences school culture, and (4) School culture is about relationships. These findings are interconnected and together provide a more complex way of looking at the data.

**Schools are a microcosm of the community.** While schools share numerous common elements, each school culture is unique. To understand a group of people, one must understand the contextual elements that influence individual and institutional behavior (Schein, 1992). Newberry Elementary School is located in the remote village of Newberry in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The district covers 1,911 square miles and is located approximately an hour from any other town. The village of Newberry has a unique history of rugged pioneerism and an interdependent relationship with state institutions that has influenced the development of school culture.

The 100-year presence of the Newberry State Hospital influenced the community as a whole and the school culture as well. This state-of-the-art facility provided a multitude of economic and cultural benefits for the community. Many of the staff and their families lived at the hospital, and patients enjoyed a variety of recreational activities such as dances, picnics, plays, and even basketball games against local teams. The hospital also sponsored local baseball teams, and the children of staff participated in an orchestra. Selected patients were often allowed to go into town with a small amount of money on their persons, to send
letters, and enjoy other freedoms. The close proximity of the hospital to the village helped normalize the perception of townspeople with mental illness.

Staff recognized the long-standing cultural and economic benefits and knew how that changed when the facility closed in the late 1990s. Mrs. Archer stated,

Prior to about 20 years ago, our community had a vibrant and active culture. We had businesses, the state mental hospital and all the businesses that went with it. When the state hospital closed, the town went downhill very quickly. Businesses closed, population left and those that stayed had lower paying jobs or no jobs. Poverty became the norm.

Mrs. Kerfoot commented, “The closing of the state hospital caused many of the professionals and their families to move away. This left our community with a large amount of low-income families who depend on state support.” Abbie Wallis summed it up by saying,

You can’t have a state hospital for 100 years without a residual effect. People were released who couldn’t afford to move anywhere else so they stayed in the community. At the same time, there was a mass exodus of professionals. While the prison brought many jobs to the area, it isn’t the same ‘socio-economic level’ as before. Many of the correctional workers commute rather than live in the community and the jobs here are viewed as a stepping stone.

The closing of the hospital had a significant cultural and economic impact on the community when many professionals relocated and businesses closed. Furthermore, many residents of the facility had nowhere else to go and became part of community-based programs. It should be no surprise then that 17.5% of Newberry’s students are eligible for special education. While this number exceeds the state average of 13.99% (Scull & Winkler,
2011), it has decreased from the high of 22% four years ago. This ongoing presence of individuals with disabilities in the community and school system became part of the culture and a commonly accepted norm.

The community suffered a huge economic blow when the Newberry State Hospital closed. This impact was softened in 1995 when the western part of the hospital was used to build the Newberry Correctional Facility. Although the prison provided employment and some relief to the business community, it did not attract the same level of professionals to the community as had the hospital.

These factors within the community influenced the school culture and led to a climate that was conducive to staff implementing RTI in their district. Staff reported an increased at-risk student population, which provided the impetus for the implementation of RTI. Mrs. Vining shared, “The climate of frustration of low test scores and students not learning the skills they need caused our staff to look at other ways to help them.” Mrs. Sterling reported, We were seeing a high number of students with special needs and those needs were not necessarily being met in the regular education setting. Our special education numbers were increasing and we knew that what we were doing wasn’t working. It was then that our staff realized that we needed to work together toward implementing a system where we could work more effectively to meet the needs of all students. We needed to change what we were doing.

The teachers at Newberry Elementary have a keen awareness of the history of their community and how these factors have influenced their school climate. When staff were asked to “describe your school culture” the majority of staff began with external factors that influenced their school culture. The main responses included the closing of the Newberry
State Hospital and the impact on the community followed by the opening of the correctional facility. These statements support the finding that each school culture is unique and that schools are a microcosm of the community in which they exist.

**RTI affects the whole school.** The implementation of RTI was not just a pedagogical change made by a small group; it was an organizational change that impacted the instructional focus of the entire school to include early intervening services and the process by which students are found eligible for special education. This affected multiple aspects of the school. The data from this study indicate that although it was a small group of teachers and the principal who went to the initial training, the initiative was shared with and embraced by the rest of the staff.

The implementation of RTI, although generally accepted by the staff still resulted in organizational issues. Many of these issues necessitated some type of accommodation or at least an understanding by the entire staff. The issues included scheduling, use of specials teachers, use of classroom teachers, student placement in classes, room locations, purchasing materials, and offering ongoing professional development so that staff have an understanding of the concept of RTI. These organizational issues presented significant challenges in a district dealing with serious budget cuts.

A prime example of how RTI affected the school was the scheduling necessary for *Power Hour*, a term the staff uses for the block of time each day that is used for individualized instruction. Many of the students at Newberry receive remedial support through RTI, using a three-tier approach. Tier I includes all students and utilizes universal support. Students are screened, and identified students receive additional Tier II support during Power Hour. Students are assessed each quarter and assigned either the additional...
remediation during Power Hour or to an enrichment time for the students who are at or above grade level. Students who continue to struggle receive an even higher level of support from the RTI Coordinator and Tier III. These services are provided by current staff, and staff identified scheduling and time as the main organizational issues. Mrs. Sully said, “The biggest obstacle has been the time I have spent preparing lessons and grading the Power Hour activities as well as ensuring I have all of the progress monitoring complete.” Mrs. Kerfoot elaborated saying,

Scheduling is a nightmare. There are times when staff members have to step up and take one for the team. For example, the fourth grade group has their specials at two different times of the day. Next year this won’t be the case. Lunches get changed every year. Special education is always a problem, making sure each student gets their appropriate amount of time per their IEP.

While these scheduling changes resulted in organizational issues with some staff losing their uninterrupted prep period or being reassigned to teach during Power Hour, the staff were still generally supportive saying “We knew something different had to be done to help these students be successful.” Ms. Macintosh, one of the specials teachers shared, “Our elementary staff has taken it upon themselves to make it work because it has to be done.”

**Leadership plays a role in change.** Newmann (1996) found that “In the majority of the schools studied, the school’s ability to sustain new practices was largely dependent on the principal’s leadership” (p. 258). Key factors included a commitment to shared governance and an entrepreneurial spirit. Further, principals were a buffer for the system, and constantly reminded others of the school’s vision. This study examined the role of leadership in regard to the implementation of RTI at Newberry School and found that support and leadership from
administrators one of the main reasons the staff was successful. Staff members confirmed administrative support. Mrs. Nutkins said, “We have been fortunate that administration has allowed us the opportunity to move ahead and be proactive before a mandatory timeline was implemented.” Mrs. Vining shared, “The superintendent has been very supportive and knows that RTI is a must and is working to implement it in higher grades.” Mrs. Sully, a fifth grade teacher, summed it up by saying,

Our administration has been very supportive in the implementation of this program. We have monthly meetings to review and make decisions for our PBIS program based on actual data, not what we are thinking. We have a teacher who is in charge of RTI and is able to assist us in making sure we can be successful.

Although school leaders often lack training on how to influence school culture, Schein (2010) described embedding mechanisms that leaders may use to influence school culture. The most powerful embedding mechanism is what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control. This can mean what is informally noticed and commented on to things that are more formally measured and dealt with in a systematic way. This can be a subtle way of reinforcing what is valued, but it is the consistency of the reinforcement that is important and not the intensity of the action. This embedding mechanism was evident in meeting agendas, budget planning, and professional development for RTI. Embedding mechanisms are important, and many of them were supported by the findings in this study. It was clear from interviews that the superintendent, principal and special education coordinator were involved and supported the implementation of RTI. Although there were many organizational and leadership issues involved in the implementation of RTI, the staff at Newberry Elementary
were able to successfully implement it despite a number of obstacles including declining enrollment and a financial crisis.

**School culture is about relationships.** Schools are collections of individuals and their relationships with others, each with their own perspective, beliefs, and values. It is through these relationships and shared understanding of their purpose that a school’s culture is preserved. The relationships among the staff at Newberry Elementary School contributed to the success of implementing RTI. One of the basic underlying assumptions was the staff’s value of collaboration and teamwork. Collaborative and a proactive teaching staff was a common theme throughout the interviews.

Bridget Newcomb described the staff as “a cohesive group” and that “A large percentage of them are local, either graduating from here or marrying someone. We spend time with each other outside of work.” Carey Suttor, the RTI coordinator reported a positive relationship among staff, saying that they are “close in age and friends; spending time outside of work.” This sense of teamwork extended to issues outside of the school, with Carey sharing how the staff had picketed to show support a few years ago when there were threats to close the prison.

The teachers’ value of teamwork and collaboration was evident in their decision to come together as a group to plan and develop a schedule to allow for Power Hour and in their willingness to give up contractually protected prep time. Their awareness of economic and social issues impacting students’ home life and academic achievement led the staff to realize they needed to change what they were doing. As with many rural communities that aren’t able to access support elsewhere, this led to increased self-reliance. Similar to the rugged
pioneers from the previous century, the staff at Newberry was used to being self-reliant and pioneers in the area of RTI.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The culture of the school affects the priorities of the school and how and when decisions are made. In one sense, schools are very conservative institutions resistant to change. Owen (1995) suggested that schools have little incentive to change, and Schein (1992) described this as equilibrium. Additionally, each school culture is unique, developing over time and based on the individuals within the system.

This study found that Newberry Elementary was able to successfully implement RTI in a district with declining resources. They were able to do this, in part, because of the school culture and the willingness of staff to give up some of their contractually protected prep or planning time and to take on other duties. During this study, a number of other factors emerged that with further investigation may provide a greater understanding of how school culture influences the implementation of RTI.

1. This study was limited to one school that implemented RTI for two years. Valuable data could be obtained from schools in the midst of planning for the implementation of RTI and schools that have institutionalized such programs for a longer period of time or ended their program.

2. Every school’s culture is unique. It would be beneficial to identify differences and examine the role of school culture at other schools that have claimed to have implemented RTI successfully.

3. This study found that the unique history of the rural community and the relationship between the school and state institutions had an impact on the school culture. Additional
research on suburban schools and other schools in close proximity to state institutions, such as psychiatric facilities and other correctional facilities, would be beneficial.

4. This study examined the relationship between school culture and the implementation of Response to Intervention in a district experiencing a high level of poverty. This study could be repeated in order to examine poverty as a factor.

5. It appeared from this study that there was little, if any, training provided to school administrators regarding school change and issues related to leadership. Instead, training was provided on content areas or programs. Further investigation into leadership practices and successful school change would be valuable.

6. This study found that certain individuals played key roles in the development of school culture and support of the implementation of RTI. Further investigation into the roles individuals play could prove beneficial to educational leaders seeking to make changes within their schools.

Summary

RTI is proposed as an alternate method of identifying student with specific learning disabilities; however, most districts have not yet implemented this approach. School change is a complex issue with most school initiatives never being fully ingrained in the school culture (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The role of school culture was central to this study, which found that schools are a microcosm of the community.

Each school culture is unique, but their culture is influenced by external factors. This study found that the school culture at Newberry was influenced by historical and community factors such as the Newberry State Hospital, Newberry Correctional Facility, and resulting change of cultural and economic status over time. These factors led to staff having a keen
sense of their relationship with the community and community norms of individuals with disabilities and poverty.

This study found that the implementation of RTI was not just a pedagogical change by a few teachers; but that RTI affects the whole school. The data from this study indicated that although a small group initially attended training in Chicago, the entire staff came together to plan and develop the schedule for Power Hour. Their decisions impacted additional staff, as specials teachers and others were assigned to provide services for RTI. Some other organizational changes included staff schedules, student placement during Power Hour, and resources such as space, time, and money for ongoing professional development. These organizational changes could have had a negative impact on school culture, but the staff at Newberry were involved in the decision-making and felt these changes needed to be done.

This study found that leadership influences school culture. Although most school initiatives are difficult to implement, school leadership often influences how and when decisions are made. Furthermore, what is noticed and valued by school leaders affects school culture. Schein (2010) identified embedding mechanisms that school leaders may use to influence school culture; several of these were noted during observations and interviews. The attention and support of administrators combined with the school culture of working together helped create a climate conducive to implementing RTI.

Finally, this study found that school culture is about relationships. Schools are a collection of individuals and their relationships with others. It is through these relationships and shared understanding of their purpose that a school’s culture is preserved. This was evident in this study, as staff identified the basic underlying assumption of collaboration and
teamwork. These values were further supported by staff in interviews in which they described themselves as a “tight-knit” group who spend time with each other outside of school. A large percentage of the staff chose to work at Newberry because they were raised there or married someone from the community. For a small rural school, an hour away from any other town, relationships are important and instill a deep sense of community, which leads to the power to accomplish goals.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A: UHSRC Approval

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Education First

October 18, 2011

To: Lynn Methner
   Education Leadership

Re: UHSRC #110908 Category. EXEMPT #2
   Approval Date: October 18, 2011

Title: "How does the Culture of an Organization Influence the Implementation of Response to Intervention?"

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC) has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that your research has been deemed as exempt in accordance with federal regulations.

The UHSRC has found that your research project meets the criteria for exempt status and the criteria for the protection of human subjects in exempt research. Under our exempt policy the Principal Investigator assumes the responsibility for the protection of human subjects in this project as outlined in the assurance letter and exempt educational material.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. If the project is completed, please submit the Human Subjects Study Completion Form (found on the UHSRC website).

Revisions: Exempt protocols do not require revisions. However, if changes are made to a protocol that may no longer meet the exempt criteria, a Human Subjects Minor Modification Form or new Human Subjects Approval Request Form (if major changes) will be required (see UHSRC website for forms).

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to human subjects and change the category of review, notify the UHSRC office within 24 hours. Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the UHSRC.

Follow-up: If your exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the UHSRC office will contact you regarding the status of the project and to verify that no changes have occurred that may affect exempt status.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-0042 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
August 18, 2011

Dear Human Subjects Review Committee,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Lynn Methner, a doctoral student for Eastern Michigan University’s Educational Leadership program. We are interested in Lynn’s qualitative study titled, “How does the Culture of an Organization Influence the Implementation of Response to Intervention” and agree to her completing her research at the Tahquamenon Area Public Schools. We understand that our participation in this is voluntary and we are happy to be supportive of this research. If you have any questions in regard to this please do not hesitate calling me.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

"Tahquamenon Area Schools is a center of learning where students, through open communication and mutual respect, experience opportunities preparing them for today and tomorrow"
Appendix C: Interview Guide Approach

1. Please describe your school culture?

2. What factors influenced the implementation of RTI in your district?

3. What community or historical factors have influenced the development of your school culture?

4. What have been the biggest obstacles to the implementation of RTI?

5. How has school leadership influenced the implementation of RTI?
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Educators have long wrestled with the issue of how to define learning disabilities and who should be served under that classification. Response to Intervention or RTI encompasses a process for evaluating whether students respond to high quality classroom instruction and evidence-based interventions as expected. As a doctoral student at Eastern Michigan University, I am interested in the role of school culture on school initiatives. This qualitative study then will research “How does the culture of an organization influence the implementation of RTI?”

I am inviting the staff of the Newberry Area Public Schools to participate in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary and your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected at all times. This qualitative study will consist of the review of artifacts, observations and informal and formal interviews. Observations and interviews may take place in your classroom or other areas of the school during the 2011-2012 school year. These observations will help describe the context of this study. By signing this form, you are giving permission for me to take notes and tape record the interview. This will help me ensure the accuracy of your statements and allow for further review.

All records of the interviews and observations will remain confidential. Even though your remarks may be recorded, your identity will not be revealed in the final study. Any quotes from the interviews and descriptions used in the final report will be anonymous or be identified with the use of a pseudonym. The information gathered will be published in my dissertation and may be used for professional conferences, presentations or journal publications. I will remain in possession of all tapes, notes, and transcripts and will not distribute them to any unauthorized person. Participation is voluntary and there is no financial benefit from participation. You may choose to end your participation in this process at any time with no penalty or retribution.

Inquiries and/or questions may be directed to Lynn Methner (doctoral candidate) by telephone at (906) 632-0918; or by e-mail at lynnmm@jklschool.org; or by mail at 600 Lincoln Way, Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783. This research protocol and informed consent document has been reviewed and approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee for the use from September 2011- September 2012. If you have questions about the approval process, please contact Dr. Deb de Laski-Smith, at 734-487-0042, Interim Dean of the Graduate School and Administrative Co-chair of UHSRC.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated participation in this interview process.

Participant’s Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Investigator’s Signature ____________________________
Appendix E: U. S. Census Data for Tahquamenon Area Schools

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Appendix F: Blueprint
Appendix G: Local Special Education Identification Rates

2007-2011

DATA: Detour Arts and Technological Academy
Appendix H: Special Education Rates By State
## Appendix I Demographic Data for Study Participants

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