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Administrator Perceptions Regarding Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework and Gifted Elementary Students

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ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTIONS REGARDING PENNSYLVANIA'S MTSS/RtII FRAMEWORK AND GIFTED ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

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Providing equitable education for all students is the responsibility of administrators, teachers, and parents. Even though the MTSS/RtII Framework has evolved from the RTI and RTII models, the basis is the same: intervening and identifying students' needs and analyzing data and programming instruction to meet all students' needs. Even though in the early stages of RTI gifted students were not included, recent literature has proven that it is a must for gifted success. When incorporating the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students, this becomes a successful model for all. In order to establish an effective MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students, administrators have to lead the implementation procedures.

This study's purpose was to analyze elementary administrators' perceptions regarding the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. The intent was to learn more about MTSS/RtII and gifted students from administrators who have been developing the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. The MTSS/RtII Framework that was renamed in 2014 categorizes students based on their abilities from data analysis. Recent literature suggests expanding from the three-tiered approach to five tiers including the high achieving and gifted students.

Participants included seven elementary administrators who are involved in the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with elementary gifted students. From the Pennsylvania

Department of Education, demographic information was collected. Elementary administrator interviews were completed.

The results demonstrate that implementing the Pennsylvania MTSS/RtII Framework requires administrator leadership. Three significant themes emerged: curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments, and collaboration/leadership. The research validated the significance of a systems thinking approach to increase effective gifted education with Renzulli's (1978 & 1977) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Triad Enrichment Model. Important points were identified regarding the consistency between schools in the same school district, time, and the MTSS/RtII procedures. This study concluded that more research should be investigated with intervention frameworks/models like the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Pennsylvania, the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) / Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) Framework is based on an early intervening strategy. It is a sequential, multi-tiered model that includes standards aligned instruction that enables students to be identified earlier with interventions to match their needs. Components of this framework include a strong core curriculum, a tiered approach to implementing research-based interventions, assessments including universal screening and progress monitoring, team decision-making that involves parents and professionals, professional development for practitioners, and central/building level leadership (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen, Sulak & Rollins, 2012).

While historically RTI has been a tool for recognizing learning needs among students who performed at levels below those of most students, the Association for the Gifted, a division of the Council for Exceptional Children (Council for Exceptional Children, 2007), recognizes the relevance of the Response to Intervention (RtI) method when identifying and teaching gifted students. In fact, this topic was presented at the 2015 PaTTAN Leadership Summer Academy: Beyond Legislation from Regulation to Practice. At this Academy for school leaders, a need for more research and data regarding Pennsylvania's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) / Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) Framework and gifted students was discussed. "The mission of the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) is to support the efforts and initiatives of the Bureau of Special Education, and to build capacity of local educational agencies to serve students who receive special education services" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011).

Depending on different references in this study, the terms *Response to Intervention (RTI, RtI), Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII),* and *Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)* might be used, but the definitions and rationales behind the three terms are the same. The RtI, RtII, and MTSS terms are mutually referential. Since this study was done in Pennsylvania, the MTSS/RtII term will be used to describe this multi-tiered system (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b). Chapter One will introduce the history, problem, purpose, research questions, identify the terms, significance, and limitations used in this study.

History of Education Reform

Response to Intervention

Monroe (1932) introduced the discrepancy model to define student needs for special education. Within this model, a student had to perform at an above average to superior range on an intelligence test and not perform similarly in the classroom before being identified as a student with learning support needs. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, critics were concerned about the model because it did not provide efficient information for interventions. Other issues included the reliability of the assessments, focusing on deficits in which students had to fail before they were referred to special education, and the over-identification and misidentification with students who have academic difficulties (Bender & Shores, 2007; Coleman & Johnsen, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012). Earliest research on RTI was in the 1960's but in the 1990's, RtI was introduced as an alternative to the discrepancy model for special education decision making. Within the last twenty years or so, the RtI process has had "significant momentum as a plausible means of identifying learning and/or reading disabilities" (Bender & Shores, 2007, p.1). This was a newer alternative for assessing students' responses to interventions before they failed rather than waiting for students to fall behind before helping with interventions (Bender &

Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

The use of RtI took another step toward prominence when The Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) was established by President George Bush to improve special education. A report was issued by the commission that recommended early intervention and assessments should be connected to instruction. The commission recommended changing the learning disability eligibility criteria from the discrepancy model to the RTI model (Bender & Shores, 2007; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

In 2002, the use of RtI for special education was reemphasized when the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities issued the *Common Ground Report*. Eight national organizational leaders met to form a consensus on their philosophies regarding students with learning disabilities. This report identified fourteen recommendations for identification, eligibility, and intervention for students with learning disabilities. Marston (2005) compared the consensus statements to determine if the RTI process completed the requirements listed in the *Common Ground Report,* and the determination was that RTI corresponded to each of the statements (as cited in Bender & Shores, 2007):

- Identification should include a student-centered, comprehensive evaluation and problem-solving approach that ensures students who have a specific learning disability are efficiently identified.
- The field should continue to advocate for the use of scientifically based practices. However, in areas where an adequate research base does not exist, data should be gathered on the success of promising practices.

- Regular education must assume active responsibility for delivery of high-quality instruction, research-based interventions, and prompt identification of individuals at risk while collaborating with special education and related services personnel.
- Schools and educators must have access to information about scientifically based practices and promising practices that have been validated in the settings where they are to be implemented.
- The ability achievement discrepancy formula should be used for determining eligibility.
- Students with specific learning disabilities require intensive, iterative (recursive), explicit scientifically based instruction that is monitored on an ongoing basis to achieve academic success.
- Students with specific learning disabilities require a continuum of intervention options through regular and special education across all grades and ages.
- Decisions on eligibility must be made through an interdisciplinary team, using informed clinical judgement, directed by relevant data, based on student needs and strengths.
- Interventions must be timely and matched to the specific learning and behavioral needs of the student.
- An intervention is most effective when it is implemented consistently, with fidelity to its design, and at a sufficient level of intensity and duration.
- Based on an individualized evaluation and continuous progress monitoring, a student who has been identified as having a specific learning disability may need

different levels of special education and related services under IDEA at various times during the school experience (p.6).

In 2004, this RTI model was introduced through Special Education as part of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA); in 2006, the act gave states the freedom to develop their own RtI process. It was not until schools were encouraged to develop optional approaches to identify struggling learners did the new RtI emerge with earlier identification, the use of developmental models compared to deficit models, and a focus on student outcomes (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012). RtI will not be effective unless it is described as a systemic process that incorporates systems change. It should be a transformation that requires administrative support. If implementation is not done systemically, RtI will be met with little success. Moreover, two important aspects of this RtI systematic process need to be followed for fidelity (i.e., curricular interventions and accountability). Curricular interventions are data-based decisions that need to be identifiable and measurable. Accountability, on the other hand, comes into play when educators are responsible for teaching in a way that displays best practices for more effective outcomes (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Rollins, Mursky, Shah-Coltrane, & Johnsen, 2009).

Pennsylvania's Response to Intervention

Pennsylvania's multi-tiered systems of support has undergone changes to meet the education reform concerns. The original Pennsylvania RtI Model was implemented in 2005 to meet the needs of all students including gifted students. This school-wide process integrated curriculum and best teaching practices with ongoing progress monitoring. The purpose of the RtI Model was for all students to be taught through high-quality, researched-based instruction,

within the regular classrooms, for success. This RtI model was a systematic and data-based method for identifying, defining, and assisting with students' academics and behaviors based on individual need. It included different tiered levels to meet the students' needs. Through tier 1, core instruction was taught to all students. If needed, students received tier 2, which contained more remedial or enrichment assistance. Students who received tier 2 or 3 interventions, which is the lowest or highest tier with the most extensive services also received tier 1 core instruction (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.).

In 2009, Pennsylvania changed the name to the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) Model. The reason for the name change was that it promoted the effective instruction in creating a strong foundation in the Response to Intervention framework. The foundation provided a standards aligned system and instructional practices to every student. The Pennsylvania Department of Education endorsed RtII "as the assessment and instructional framework to organize and implement Pennsylvania's Standards Aligned System (SAS*)* to improve student achievement" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.).

As student needs evolved and educators recognized the value of leveled instruction, the term RtII inadequately represented its function. A more encompassing name with commensurately expanded links to existing programs and processes, the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) now makes use of Pennsylvania Core Standards and the Pennsylvania's Educator Effectiveness System to evaluate the level at which educators are bridging the what-how gap. Core standards are representing the "what" and the MTSS is showing the "how". Evidence associated with areas like planning and preparation and instruction are collected as the MTSS adoption and implementation occurs (Pennsylvania Department of Education. n.d.a; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.).

Gifted Education

Gifted education has been an integral part of public school for years. However, evidence suggests that limited attention has been focused on this group. “Gifted education has a relatively long history of serving an experimental role for the innovation and reform of general education” (Dai & Chen, 2014, p. 108). In 1972, the Marland report expanded the giftedness definition to include students with exceptional skills in domains like fine arts, leadership, and creativity. The National Excellence (U.S. Department of Education, 1993) report focused on promoting students’ strengths rather than their deficits. This report also encouraged educators to incorporate challenging learning opportunities, especially for gifted students (Coleman & Johnsen, 2013). Other reform contributions included expanded views of intelligence, instructional strategies and techniques, student centered learning, and individualized education. As noted by several research studies, changes must also be made in general education for a curriculum that is tailored for gifted students’ needs and instruction needs to be differentiated and accelerated so gifted students can be successful (Boswell & Carlile, 2010; Coleman & Johnsen, 2013; Conklin & Frei, 2007; Dai & Chen, 2014; Tomlinson, 1999).

Within an RtI model, there is no need for assigning labels to students. Rather, just as is the process for students with skill deficits, a label defining/describing their behaviors and unique needs may be a more appropriate practice. It becomes a collaborative effort to ensure student success as they receive interventions and support (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012). To combine collaboration and to compare to the RtI model, Treffinger’s proposal (as cited in Coleman & Harrison, 1997) addressed nurturing potential and providing responses to support all children’s success:

- All children need and deserve a challenging and enriched learning environment.

- Many children have periodic needs to go beyond the regular curriculum.
- Some children have sustainable needs for differentiation within a content area.
- Few children will have needs that go well beyond those of others and will need an education plan (p. 47).

Response to Intervention (RtI) is defined as a schoolwide initiative which should include special education and regular education. Through this framework all students receive research-based instructional practices with a multi-tiered system based on their specific needs. RtI could assist all students in reaching their fullest potentials when this model is paired with gifted education (Boswell & Carlile, 2010; Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2009). Table 1 demonstrates how the MTSS/RtII could be used to incorporate regular education, special education, and gifted education into a cohesive educational program in which all students achieve.

Table 1

RtI Principle

Traditional RtI	Actions for struggling students	Implications for gifted learners
Early Intervention	Services can be provided to at-risk students instead of "waiting to fail".	Services can be provided to at-potential instead of waiting to test.
Universal screening	Used for analyzing data for remedial instruction.	Used for analyzing data for acceleration and enrichment.
Progress Monitoring	Monitoring student progress throughout the year and moving students to appropriate tiered instruction.	Monitoring student progress throughout the year and moving students beyond tiered instruction.

Multi-System of interventions	Interventions provided for individual remedial needs.	Interventions provided for individual enrichment needs.
Professional Development	Teacher training that includes research-based intervention techniques for at-risk students.	Teacher training that includes research-based intervention techniques for at-potential students.
Collaboration	Collaboration can be done through team meetings that include regular education teachers, learning support teachers, support personnel, administrators, and families.	Collaboration can be done through team meetings that include regular education teachers, gifted support teachers, support personnel, administrators, and families.
Parent Involvement	Effective communication with parents regarding data and interventions using student interests and needs.	Effective communication with parents regarding data and interventions using student interests and talents.
Budgets	Money is allotted through Special Education to meet the needs of the at-risk learners.	Money can be allotted through different means to meet the needs of gifted students.

Note. Adapted from "Meeting the needs of gifted students within an RtI framework," by R. A. Coleman & C. Hughes, 2009. *Gifted Child Today, 32*(3), p. 14–17. Copyright 2009 by *Gifted Child Today*.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of providing appropriate evaluation and intervention for gifted students is linked in two facts: first is the much deserved attention paid to students with learning or behavioral deficits. Second is a natural tendency to rely on the fact that gifted students can work and grow more independently than can other students in an educational setting (Dai & Chen, 2014). The discussion will describe these elements in order to situate the problem in the overall educational context.

The regular education curriculum has become challenging for both learners and teachers (Bender & Shores, 2007; Johnsen, Sulak, & Rollins, 2012). Therefore, all learners including those at the top of the class need tiered interventions to grow academically. By focusing on struggling students, teachers unintentionally fail to incorporate the needs of the gifted students within the interventions (Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Rollins et al., 2009).

The implementation of NCLB (2001) challenged school districts to work harder than ever to support their struggling students (Boswell & Carlile, 2010; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2003; United States Department of Education, 2004, Xiang, Dahlin, Cronin, Theaker, & Durant, 2011). Unfortunately, teachers are not giving the gifted students the education they deserve and need. In 1992, Renzulli and Reis conducted a study that found that 40-50% of the regular curriculum could be eliminated for the top 10-15% of high achieving students (Renzulli, 1994). This study demonstrates that students of high ability require modifications to curriculum content and/or its pace for their specific needs. Xiang et al. (2011) found that, without specific interventions, between 30 to 50% of advanced students regress and no longer achieve at their most advanced levels.

For years, educators have had difficulty developing a "perfect" process for identifying the gifted students in their schools and classrooms. It is not always easy to identify gifted students because higher ability students all have different needs and educators have different opinions of what "gifted" means (Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Dai & Chen, 2014; Sousa, 2009; Winebrenner, 1992). Incorporating Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with the gifted population may provide a more data-driven, scientifically researched method of educating all students rather than

teaching all the students in the same manner and with the same curriculum (Boswell & Carlile, 2010; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

One concern is that almost every piece of information regarding the Response to Intervention Model states the connection to the struggling learners and that is how most schools seem to be interpreting its purpose (Hughes & Rollins, 2009). That was the model's original intent. However, there is also information referring to RtI as a model for effective school-wide reform, as "Every Ed" rather than "Special Ed," as having the ability to transform how teachers educate all students. However, this cannot happen if the focus of RtI implementation is limited to the struggling learner (Boswell & Carlile, 2010; Hughes, Rollins, Johnsen, Pereles, Omdal, Baldwin, Brown, Abernethy & Coleman, 2009). "Twice-exceptional college students often report that they received little guidance in elementary and high school to help them reconcile their academic talents" (Sousa, 2009, p. 115). High achievers are not challenged resulting in low grades and low interest. This is a typical problem associated with the gifted learner (Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Conklin & Frei, 2007; Dai & Chen, 2014; Sousa, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study's purpose was to analyze the perceptions of Pennsylvania elementary administrators regarding the use of the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students. The intent was to learn more about MTSS/RtII and gifted students from administrators who have been developing the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. The MTSS/RtII Framework, renamed in 2014, is a multi-tiered system implemented to meet the needs of all students including gifted students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.). The term "administrator" will be recognized for this study and

will be defined as a leader accountable for the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Framework implementation with gifted elementary students.

This study will analyze Pennsylvania elementary administrators' perceptions regarding the MTSS/RtII Framework specifically with gifted students. Although the MTSS/RtII Framework has many aspects, this study was limited to elementary school administrators' perceptions for developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. For validation, the researcher obtained a list of Pennsylvania school districts that were developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with their elementary schools. To obtain further reliability, PaTTAN confirmed the need for the implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted children. After the list of school districts was obtained, letters were sent to all of the elementary schools in each district asking permission for administrator interviews since administrators organize and lead the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support implementation (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.). Hughes et al. (2009) stated:

> "When establishing RtI on a campus, all personnel and all departments must work together in a cohesive fashion in order for the process to work. Most importantly, administration must provide good leadership in order to encourage and foster change" (p.59).

Qualitative knowledge gained from interviewing elementary administrators can lead to empirical data to better meet gifted students' needs. Data from these interviews were interpreted, analyzed, compared, and applied through narrative research. This study may help as a guide to early identification of high achieving students and/or continue to help gifted students reach their fullest potentials, or both. The findings will add to the existing research pertaining to the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted elementary students as perceived by school administrators. By

correlating Renzulli's "Three-Ring" Conception of Giftedness and the Enrichment Triad Theory (as cited in Coleman & Johnsen, 2013) and systems thinking (Meadows, 2008), this study will address different possibilities of the development of Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII framework with gifted elementary students.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of Pennsylvania's elementary administrators on the use of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) / Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) Framework with gifted students?
2. What are the perceptions of the Pennsylvania's elementary administrators in regards to the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students' data analysis and alignment of instruction?
3. What underlying themes emerge from interviews with Pennsylvania elementary administrators about the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students?

Definition of Terms

Acceleration is a technique implemented when gifted students master a concept and/or standard and are ready for more challenging curriculum and materials (Dai & Chen, 2014; Winebrenner, 1992).

Administrator, for this study, is defined as a leader accountable for the MTSS/RtII implementation with gifted students in an elementary level school setting. As a leader, this person engages in opportunities to mediate perceptions through dialogue to inquire, to reflect and create actions based on this information (Lambert, 1998).

Collaboration is a data based decision making effort among teachers, students, and parents to use student data to guide instruction. Formative and summative assessments and teacher, parent, and student recommendations can be used (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011; Johnsen, et al, 2012; Winebrenner, 1992).

Data-based decision making is a "framework for analyzing student data and for guiding instruction and tiered interventions. Some sources could include benchmark assessments and progress monitoring" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, p. 16).

Differentiated instruction is a process in which instruction is adapted or enriched for gifted students' needs (Conklin & Frei, 2007; Dai & Chen, 2014; Tomlinson, 1999).

Discrepancy model is the model introduced by Monroe (1932) to identify students for special education (Coleman & Johnsen, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

Enrichment is when gifted students are provided activities that provide greater depth to a topic (Conklin & Frei, 2007; Winebrenner, 1992).

Gifted education is providing services and programs to gifted students in a school setting. Each state has its own definition for identification purposes (Conklin & Frei, 2007; Special Education for Gifted Students, 2003).

Gifted students are defined as elementary students that have been identified as having an Intelligent Quotient (IQ) of 130 or higher or/or have met other criteria that qualifies these students to receive additional enrichment or accelerated curriculum (Special Education for Gifted Students, 2003),

GIEP stands for gifted individualized education plan. It must be individualized and address the gifted learners' needs through acceleration, enrichment, or both (Special Education for Gifted Students, 2003).

GMDT is the gifted multidisciplinary team should include the regular classroom teacher, gifted support teacher, teacher leader, parents, and students, school psychologist, and director of special education. It is a systematic process of assessments and other data to support the student's need to whether or not the student qualifies for gifted education (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Special Education for Gifted Students, 2003).

Grade level benchmarks and outcome assessments are assessments given throughout the year to measure students' performance compared to their grade level standards and end of the year benchmarks (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013).

Multi-tiered systems of support is now what Pennsylvania is calling RtII. It is recognized as a sequential system of supports that include standards-aligned instruction, universal screening, progress monitoring, team decision making, tiered services and parent involvement, school leadership, and professional development. It is relatively synonymous with RtII and is for all students in areas like academics (Coleman & Johnsen, 2013, Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a,).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was adopted in 2001. It is a mandate that changed education by focusing on accountability for student achievement K-12. It gives parents a voice in their children's education and provides a more scientific, research-based instructional focus for all students (Boswell & Carlile, 2010; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2003).

Parent engagement is communication provided to parents through report cards, parent-teacher conferences, advisory groups, screenings, and team meetings. Parent involvement is crucial in the education of the student (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

Professional development is training for teachers based on gifted students' needs which include best practices (Coleman & Johnsen 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

Progress monitoring is the completed throughout the school year to determine student progress and make adaptions the instruction as needed (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

Regular classroom setting is where instructional groupings within the regular classroom occur. The regular classroom provides enrichment students without a GIEP a full range of educational opportunities to meet their needs (Dai & Chen, 2014; Winebrenner, 1992).

The response to intervention model (RtI) is a "sequential, research-based, and tiered intervention model. Students are placed in tiers according to their abilities and achievement. Data analysis is done on a regular basis including progress monitoring, benchmark assessments, and meeting outcome goals" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, p. 4).

The response to instruction and intervention model (RtII) is the framework that was previously known as the Response to Intervention (RTI or RtI). The reason for the name change "reiterates PA's vision of RtII as a school-wide, regular education, school improvement process designed to ensure high quality instruction and intervention for all students" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.).

Screening and evaluation process is the systematic manner in which a student qualifies for gifted. If a student meets the criteria for the screening, then he/she will have specially designed instruction to meet his/her own needs (Boswell & Carlile, 2010, Conklin & Frei, 2007).

Shared Ownership is when all school personnel and parents work together to enhance instruction and outcomes for all students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

Standards aligned system is defined as effective, research-based instruction aligned to Pennsylvania Core standards (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.).

A universal screener is when all students are screened to for academic benchmarks based on grade level standards (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

Significance of the Study

Recently support has been researched for the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students (Boswell & Carlile, 2010; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012). Administrator perceptions regarding the MTSS/RtII Framework are crucial because the value placed on any process by leadership has a major effect for any school program (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). If the development of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students is managed appropriately and there is evidence of success, then this concept can not only help students in one school but might change how gifted education is delivered in Pennsylvania. RtI could have an impact for policymakers because of classroom best practices that meet the needs all students (National Association of State Directors, 2006). Even though people have debated the definition of gifted education, there is no doubt that there are advanced learners in schools that need to be challenged so they do not become another statistic of high achievers underachieving (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Dai & Chen, 2014; DeNisco, 2015).

Limitations of the Study

In this study, several limitations emerged. To provide an in-depth analysis of Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students and the fidelity of the framework with gifted students, the amount of participants in this study was limited to Pennsylvania elementary administrators who were responsible for the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support development with gifted elementary students. The school leaders had to be elementary administrators for at least three years in the same position. The researcher tried to create a diverse sample of elementary administrators representing different genders, races, and cultures.

The school districts and schools identified for the study were ones recognized as developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students by the Pennsylvania Technical Assistance and Network (PaTAAN) affiliated with the Pennsylvania Department of Education. At this time, no large-scale studies have applied the MTSS/RtII Framework to gifted students (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013).

Summary

In response to meeting the needs of the elementary gifted population more effectively, this study was based on researching Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted education. By combining Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted education, the gifted students' needs may be addressed and met more effectively. School administrators are being called on to lead education reform and change to meet the needs of all of their students (Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Laster, 2014). The use of the MTSS/RtII is in the early stages but research is lacking to validate its use incorporating gifted education. Further research will be needed to analyze perceptions of administrators who are implementing a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support with gifted elementary students. Analyzing important factors that are essential for the comprehensive implementation of the MTSS/RtII with gifted elementary students, school districts can implement effective tiered frameworks across Pennsylvania and throughout the country.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This qualitative study explores the implementation of Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students from elementary administrators' perspectives. Information regarding RtI (RTI), RtII, MTSS, and Pennsylvania's definition of gifted education is essential. It is important to learn about major educational reform considerations that might change the way curriculum is presented and measured for everyone including gifted students (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Johnsen et al., 2012).

Studies have provided evidence for effective gifted education change (Marland, 1972; Robertson, 2012; United States Department of Education, 1993, Vacca, 2011). At the same time recent literature has established the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support as a sound foundation on which to improve education for gifted learners. Students who are identified as gifted tend to do better than their peers with or without interventions like the MTSS/RtII Framework. However, in addition to the aforementioned proposition that that the ability of gifted students to perform to their potential is stymied when they participate in unmodified curriculum, these learners may also fall behind their peers (Assouline, Colangelo, & VanTassel-Baska, 2015; Boswell & Carlile, 2010; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Davis, 2006). General curriculum should not be a cookie cutter because not everyone will fit the same mold. There ought to be a curriculum that is appropriately challenging for at-risk students who struggle as well as for students who are at-potential and gifted. It is further postulated that an improvement would be to eliminate labels that define students and to instead label the behaviors to meet student needs (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Dai & Chen, 2014; Johnsen et al., 2012; Renzulli, 1999). With a tiered framework like the MTSS/RtII Framework in which instruction is differentiated and progress is frequently

monitored and assessed, all students including the gifted students have the same opportunity to succeed and be challenged (Assouline et al., 2015; Boswell & Carlile, 2010; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Hughes et al., 2009). While the topic of gifted education is not new, implementing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted education can rejuvenate the way educators teach gifted students.

This review of literature will include the purpose of implementing Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students, as well as the definitions and history of MTSS/RtII, and gifted education. The MTSS/RtII Framework will be defined and the Pennsylvania's gifted standards and terms including Pennsylvania's School Code and specific chapters that apply to gifted education will be addressed. Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Concept of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model will serve as the theoretical framework for this study. Combining these theories and frameworks together will also address the concept of systems thinking (Hall & Hord, 2011; Lunenberg, 2011; Meadows, 2010; Senge, 2006). Research on the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted education and will be described, including studies which attempted to list MTSS/RtII components correlated to gifted education. Due to the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted education being a new topic, existing challenges on this topic will also be explored.

Purpose of the Response to Intervention Model

Research regarding the Response to Intervention model began in the 1960s, but it has been in the last two decades that the model gained special attention among researchers and educators as an effective method to identify learning disabilities (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012). RtI can be viewed as a tool for progress-monitoring for all students (Bender & Shores, 2007; Demirsky

& Goddard, 2010; Griffiths, Parson, Burns, VanDerHeyden, & Tilly, 2007). "Although the Response to Instruction idea has received a great deal of attention since the report of the Presidential Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002), only in December 2004, was the legislation passed that allowed the use of RTI as an eligibility procedure" (Bender & Shores, 2007, p.97). RtI is a systems change. When a systematic procedure is in place for all students, two essential outcomes can occur: (1) curricular interventions are data-based decisions that are related to measurable outcomes and (2) there is accountability for best teaching practices (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013).

In the state of Pennsylvania, the Response to Intervention (RtI) term was utilized to describe the tiered system based on student needs. Then, the instruction piece was included in 2007 to create the name: Response to Instruction and Intervention. "RtII is a general education effort for all students to identify and help those students who need academic and behavioral help long before they fail" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a.; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.). There is now a shift in thinking about rigorous teaching practices for all students. "Using systematic methods and having data as feedback provides the opportunity for educators to "learn to learn" and become more effective and efficient with experiences" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a.).

Definition of the Response to Intervention Model

The RtI Model is a tiered model which "offers a definition of Response to Intervention that reflects what is currently known from research and evidence-based practice. This model integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems. Schools use RtI to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, to monitor student progress, to provide evidence-based interventions

and, depending on a student's responsiveness, to adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, p. 4). RtI is also used to identify students with learning disabilities or gifts and talents (Bender & Shores, 2007: Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

There are two approaches within the RtI model: the Standard Protocol Model and the Problem-Solving Model. Within the Standard Protocol Model, clear scientific processes for all students are set using the same curriculum and assessments. The lessons may be scripted and the goal is for most of the students to reach mastery levels. This method can be used for struggling and advanced learners if the curriculum is differentiated (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

Since there are limited options for flexibility with the Standard Protocol Model and the belief that one curriculum does not meet every student's needs, the Problem-Solving Model is a second way to implement RtI. This model is based on individual student needs and allows more flexibility within the model. The Problem-Solving Model relies on a systematic plan which includes intensive interventions (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012). The basis for this model is a cyclical problem-solving process involving four steps: 1. Define the Problem. 2. Plan an Intervention. 3. Implement the Intervention. 4. Evaluate the Student's Progress (Bender and Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008; Rollins et al., 2009).

The RtI Model incorporates the use of high-quality, research-based, standardized curriculum in Tier 1. It monitors growth and provides collaboration among educators (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013). Figure 1 shows how all students are incorporated in all three tiers.

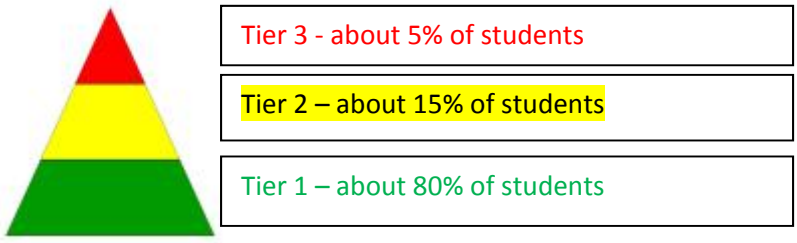

Figure 1. Response to Intervention model. Adapted from "RTI for gifted? Are you sure?!?!?" by T. Fisher, 2009. *Education Week*. Copyright 2009 by the *Education Week*.

Tier 1: Foundation/Standards Aligned Instruction for All Students. According to Figure 1, about 80% of students succeed in Tier 1 (Colorado Department of Education, 2006; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

Definition: "Standards aligned instruction and school-wide foundational instruction are provided to all students in the general education core curriculum. Tier 1 also is used to designate for students who are making expected grade level progress (benchmark students) in the standards aligned system and who demonstrate social competence. Foundation/Benchmark instruction is high quality, effective instruction designed to engage and challenge students. It provides clear and high expectations for student learning and effective support to enhance student engagement in the learning process and to promote school completion or other periodic progress monitoring benchmark assessments" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, p. 18).

Tier 2: Strategic Interventions for Some Students. According to Figure 1, about 15% need Tier 1 and Tier 2 intervention (Colorado Department of Education, 2006; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

Definition: "Academic strategies, methodologies and practices designed for some students who are not making expected progress in the standards aligned system and who are at risk for academic failure. Students require additional academic support to successfully engage in the

learning process and succeed in the standards aligned system. Strategic interventions are standards aligned instruction with supplemental, small group instruction, which may include specialized materials and use of standard protocol interventions" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, p. 19).

Tier 3: Intensive Interventions for a Few Students. According to Figure 1, about 5% need Tier 1 and Tier 3 interventions (Colorado Department of Education, 2006; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

Definition: Academic strategies, methodologies and practices are designed for a few students who are significantly below established grade-level benchmarks in the standards aligned system. Intensive interventions use of standard protocol interventions may include supplemental instructional materials for specific skill development, small, intensive, flexible groups, additional tutoring provided by specialists as part of the school day, instructional changes based data based decision making" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, p. 19).

Definition of Pennsylvania's Multi-Tiered System of Supports Framework / Response to Intervention and Instruction Model

Morphing the RtI model into the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) not only provides better results for students academically, but also provides all students with better instruction and outcomes. The MTSS identifies students who struggle and who exceed, focuses on tiered instruction and intervention supports, analyzes progress, and offers professional learning efforts for staff. RTI evaluates the effectiveness of the system of supports. Both the MTSS and RTI are instrumental in the success of all students (Boswell & Carlile, 2010, Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012). "Pennsylvania's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is defined as a comprehensive system of supports in the Commonwealth that also includes standards-aligned, culturally responsive and high quality core instruction, universal

screening, data-based decision-making, family engagement, and central/building level leadership. The PA-MTSS represents a broad set of evidence-based practices that may be implemented across a system to include academics and behavior within a recursive and systematic problem-solving process" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.).

History of Concepts of Giftedness

In the 19th century there were no "gifted children" simply "because the construct of the gifted child had not yet been dreamed up" (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005, p.3). In the century since then the concept of giftedness has been extensively discussed and defined/redefined. Pinpointing the meaning of giftedness is a process because theorists and practitioners have disparate views of what it entails (Coleman & Johnsen, 2013; Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). "With the publication of *Classroom Problems in the Education of Gifted Children: The Nineteenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Henry, 1920) at the end of that decade, the educational establishment signaled that it had acceded to the belief that there were, indeed, gifted children in our schools" (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005, p. 3). With the acknowledgement of the existence of the gifted student in the early 20th century came the "mental testing movement" (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Lewis M. Terman, father of gifted education, developed the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale and is responsible for mental testing in American schools (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). In the 1920's, a wave of immigrants came to America. Educating students with different beliefs and cultural perspectives was a new and unsettling experience. U.S. schools tried to "Americanize" these children in homogenous groups and found that performance levels varied. Administrators used IQ testing scores to label students as gifted or not gifted (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). This early practice is in contrast to Renzulli's more recent work (1978), the definition proffered by the

Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness suggests that giftedness is a combination of task commitment, creativity, and ability. According to the National Association for Gifted Children:

> Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude or competence in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system and/or set of sensorimotor skills. The development of ability or talent is a lifelong process. It can be evident in young children as exceptional performance on tests and/or other measures of ability or as a rapid rate of learning, compared to other students of the same age, or in actual achievement domain. As individuals mature through childhood to adolescence, however, achievement and high levels of motivation in the domain become the primary characteristics of their giftedness. Various factors can either enhance or inhibit the development and expression of abilities.
>
> A person's giftedness should not be confused with the means by which giftedness is observed or assessed. Parent, teacher, or student recommendations, a high mark on an examination, or a high IQ score are not giftedness; they may be a signal that giftedness exists. Some of these indices of giftedness are more sensitive than others in differences in the person's environment. (para. 4-6) (Coleman & Johnsen, 2013, p. 6)

Gifted Education

"Programs for gifted children are part of the array of special offerings available for all exceptional children. These programs reflect individual differences, equal educational opportunity, and desire for the optimal development of each child. Programs that are based on sound philosophical, theoretical, and empirical foundations are those most likely to benefit gifted

students" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, p. 4). Gifted education has developed programs separate for general education, but gifted education is changing (Assouline et al., 2015; Dai & Chen, 2014, Davis, 2006; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Following is a review of current opinions/philosophies about the education of gifted children.

Gifted education is defined in various ways and does not fall under the federal mandate. This means that education programming decisions are under state control and can create a sense of loss for educators who want to help gifted students succeed (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Dai & Chen, 2014; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Standards should guide services for any special population of students.

According to the National Association for Gifted Children, standards should guide curriculum for gifted learners. There are six gifted education programming standards: learning and development, assessment, curriculum and instruction, learning environments, programming, and professional development which are research-based (Hughes et al., 2009; Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

"Like all exceptional children, the gifted student possesses special characteristics that significantly affect that student's ability to learn. In order to provide a meaningful benefit, the gifted students' curriculum must be appropriately modified on an individual basis" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, p. 4). The gifted student demonstrates characteristics that significantly have an impact on his/her learning. In order for students to achieve to their highest potentials, the curriculum must be created and taught based on individual need (Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Friedman, 2005; Renzulli, 1999).

Gifted education should be embedded in the regular curriculum and not operate as an add-on program. Early intervention is crucial for meeting the needs of gifted students but

students may or may not be formally tested (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008; Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Friedman, 2005). “The key to challenging the gifted student is the connection between instruction and individual cognitive and affective behaviors. Emphasis in special programs for these students should be on the stimulation of the cognitive processes of creativity, originality, problem solving and complexity (increasing content depth and sophistication” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, p.4). This correlates with Renzulli’s (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli’s (1977) Enrichment Triad Model in relation to the MTSS/RtII tiered system (Coleman & Johnsen, 2013; Renzulli, 1999).

The responsibility of schools districts must include acceleration and enrichment which are appropriate for students’ needs in their gifted individualized plans. Also, the core curriculum and instructional strategies have to be reviewed and updated to meet the needs of gifted learners (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, p. 29). Gifted students are not just gifted for a specific time each day or week. Responsibility for development and implementation of each GIEP is shared between regular education teachers, support staff, gifted education teachers, and administrators. Gifted education needs to clearly identify research-based instructional practices that have evidence to support their use (Colorado Department of Education, 2006; Dai & Chen, 2014, Davis, 2006).

“Developing decision points for more intensive services is essential. Among a major issue is determining the point students need more intensive services. When does the teacher refer a child for education? What constitutes inadequate progress or progress that requires more than the general education classroom? What assessments should be used in this more comprehensive level of evaluation?” (Hughes et al., 2009, p. 60). Research has proven that gifted students may have different tolerances to adaptability than their counterparts (Assouline et al., 2015; Coleman

& Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Dai & Chen, 2014). Decision-making guidelines must be created that include these kinds of questions for high-end learners.

The MTSS/RtII Framework is an appropriate complement to the above recommendations of best practices in gifted education. Progress monitoring is implemented to determine needs for instructional levels and teaching strategies to support the student will be required when implementing this MTSS/RtII Framework. It will be necessary to identify appropriate assessments to determine potential growth of gifted students. The general education teacher will need to use assessments that are above grade level. “Such assessments are similar to the “state tests that are tightly aligned grade-level expectations. The inclusion of above-grade-level assessments or those that assess what gifted students know is a challenge within the RtI model” (Hughes et al., 2009, p. 60).

History of Pennsylvania’s Gifted Education

The Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949, 24 P. S. § § 1-101—27-2702 followed by all schools to educate all students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014), recognizes that gifted students are considered to be “children with exceptionalities” and are in need of specially designed instruction. The history that led to the most current gifted education regulations includes the following (as cited in Pennsylvania Department of Education, Gifted Education Guidelines, 2014) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Gifted Education History

1961	The term, "handicapped education" moved to exceptional education" according to the Public School Code of 1949. This began the identification and programs for gifted learners (Act 546 of 1961)
1975	The State Board included that "exceptional persons" are to receive an appropriate gifted program based on meeting their individual gifted needs.
1975	Pennsylvania courts acknowledged that gifted students are entitled to as many of the same rights as students with disabilities. Central York School District v. Department of Education, 41 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1979); Lisa H. v. State Board of Education, 447 A.2d 669. 673 n. 6 (PA. Comwlth, 1982), *aff'd*, 467 A.2d 1127 (Pa. 1983); and Centennial School District v. Department of Education, 539 A.2d 785 (Pa. Cmwlth.1988)
1989-90	The General Assembly directed the State Board of Education and the Department of Education to revise the special education regulations and standards to include gifted education. (Act 43 of 1989). Effective July 1, 1990, the new regulations and standards were approved. See 22 Pa. Code Chapter 14 (regulations) and Chapter 342 (standards) that included gifted provisions.
2000	State Board Regulations, Chapter 16: Special Education for Gifted Students, effective Dec 9, 2000
2008	Current State Board of Regulations, Chapter 16: Special Education for Gifted Students, effective Nov 8, 2008.

Note. Adapted from "Gifted Education Guidelines," by Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, p. 6. Copyright 2014 by Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Definition of Pennsylvania's Gifted Education

The Pennsylvania gifted "guidelines are an overview of both acceptable and best practices, procedures, and policies designed to meet the learning needs of gifted students. These guidelines reflect Pennsylvania's continuing commitment to providing educational services appropriate for mentally gifted students that are consistent with their individual needs, outstanding abilities, and potential for performing at high levels of accomplishment"

(Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, p. 3). Gifted education is instruction specifically designed to meet the needs and progress of gifted students. According to state guidelines, gifted instruction should "be conducted in an instructional setting, provided in an instructional or skill area, at no cost to the parents, and under the authority of a school district" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, p. 3).

Chapter 4 of the Pennsylvania School Code relates to the academic standards and assessment element of gifted education. Its purpose is "to facilitate the improvement of student achievement and to provide parents and communities a measure by which school performance can be determined. The revised Chapter 4 lists planning requirements for school entities. A school entity is defined as being a local education provider (public school district) and every six years, each school district must develop and implement an updated gifted education plan. Identifying gifted students is under the requirement of core foundations and safe and supportive schools. The following are also part of the Student Service Plan under Chapter 4: diagnostic, intervention and referral services, consultation and coordination services, communication of educational opportunities, collaboration for interventions, and community coordination" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, p. 6). It should be noted that these requirements can be met by following the steps of the MTSS/RtII framework.

In the Pennsylvania School Code, Chapter 16 specifies the gifted education requirements and the procedures to meet the needs of potential and identified students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.c.). Gifted students should be have the same opportunities to high quality education programs to meet their unique characteristics, and that their instruction is supervised. Gifted education should enhance the use of innovative practices and programs to their needs. Services and programs need to be planned and developed for the identifying and

evaluating each gifted student; they also need to be specific need based of the gifted student. Opportunities to participate in acceleration, enrichment, or both to match their talents and abilities should be offered (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.c.).

Gifted Identification

Structuring both formal definitions of gifted education and specific procedures for identifying giftedness is important because these elements guide a district's entire gifted instructional program. A formal definition adopted by a state or school district will influence the foundation of a gifted program and how the students are taught and identified (Davis, 2006; National Association for Gifted Students, n.d.; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014). According to Plucker, et al., and Wang (2015), gifted identification varies from state to state. Pennsylvania is one of thirty-one states that require districts to identify gifted students. In Pennsylvania, a student is identified as gifted if he/she meets the definition of mentally gifted and demonstrates outstanding intellectual and creative ability. Students can be identified by a combination of universally accepted tools: intelligence quotient testing, screening processes, by teacher recommendation/ parent recommendation, formative assessments, and grades (Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014). The term, "regular education environment" includes the regular classroom in which students without a GIEP have opportunities to have their needs met through acceleration and/or enrichment (Dai & Chen, 2014; Winebrenner, 1992).

Gifted identification is a deliberate process aimed at determining whether or not a child is a "good fit" for a particular curriculum (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006). A screening process is implemented to identify students. If a student meets the criteria of the screening, he/she will receive specially designed instruction which will include

some form of adaptations and/or modifications to the general curriculum (Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014). Across states and even across school districts, the identification process can be handled differently. In some cases, students may be two grades ahead of their age-peers (Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006).

The role of the administrator

An important leader in the gifted education process is the school administrator. The role of an administrator should be that of an advocate for all students ranging from at-risk to at-potential students. Because their attitudes can influence the outlook of teachers, administrators have indirect power to increase student achievement among all learners. "It is the actions and behaviors of teachers that directly affect student achievement since teachers are the providers of instruction" but, "the principal affects teachers who in turn have a direct influence on student achievement" (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, p. 49). Figure 2 displays these actions:

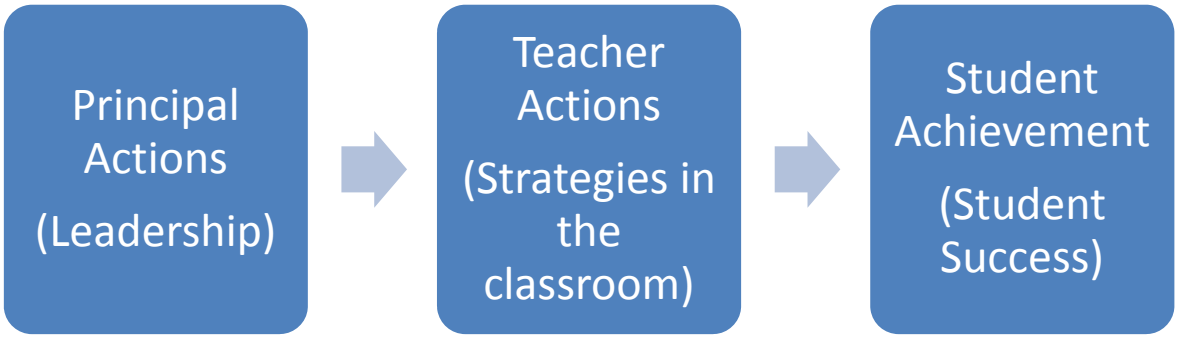

Figure 2. Relationship between principal behavior and student achievement. Adapted from "Leaders of Learning" by R. Dufour & R.J., Marzano, 2011, p. 49. Copyright 2011 by the Solution Tree Press.

Implementing gifted education within an MTSS/RtII Framework provides an opportunity for administrators to think differently about teaching practices for gifted students and to provide gifted students with assessments, high quality instruction, and collaboration to meet their needs

(Assouline et al., 2015; Colorado Department of Education, 2009; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008; Hughes et al., 2009).

The Marriage between MTSS/RtII and the Gifted Student

Recently published literature supports the use of instructional approaches like Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework for evaluating and supporting gifted elementary students (Dai & Chen, 2014; Fisher, 2009; Ornstein, 2011; Perkins, 2009; Searle, 2010). "RTI is one way to increase learning for all students, which is proven by research. This was the best practice in 2006, and nothing less will do" (Bender & Shores, 2007, p. 131). As gifted students require challenging material to further push their learning process, teachers can use the materials to encourage the use of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This process will encourage gifted students to actively practice the higher levels of cognition in their daily classroom tasks (Conklin & Frei, 2007).

There are similarities between frameworks, similar to the MTSS/RtII Framework, and gifted education that validate the use of such tools to ensure that the commitment to support "all students'" truly includes all students (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Johnsen et al., 2012). Like the MTSS/RtII Framework, gifted education provides a tiered approach to programs. The levels in programs accommodate the gifted learners (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Davis, 2006; Friedman, 2005). The MTSS/RtII Framework provides support systems for students with at-potential possibilities. Strengths of high achieving students require special provisions (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012).

Implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students

Ability grouping can provide demanding opportunities for gifted students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014). "When effective models in gifted education are integrated with

effective Response to Intervention models occasions for the enhancement of gifts and talents are multiplied" (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, p. 276). This model creates a new problem-solving culture in schools; it focuses on talent development and on service rather than labels; it provides better service to traditional groups in gifted education, enhances general education curriculum, develops a more personalized and individualized accountability system, identifies more evidence-based strategies in gifted education, develops collaborative partnerships, and builds responsive educational systems (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Davis, 2006; Friedman, 2005). "RtI has positive implications for gifted education as a framework for policy development because it is an integrative approach to classroom practices that modify high-quality instruction based upon students' academic or behavioral needs" (National Association of State Directors, 2006).

In order for the MTSS/RtII implementation to be effective with gifted students, three components must be in place: screening and prevention; early intervention, and; specific criteria for the RtII tiers to help schools provide successful learning for all students (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Colorado Department of Education, 2006).

Educators need to reexamine their beliefs about meeting all students' needs. When RtI is used to support "gifted education, the emphasis within RtI on early intervention or recognition of strengths prior to the formal identification assumes a commitment to nurture the potential of all children. This combination incorporates tiered responses that scaffold learning and support across general and gifted education with commitment to excellence for all groups. The use of dynamic assessments to inform instruction is an example of data-driven decision making" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, p. 16). Similarly, the use of standard protocols

enables teachers to differentiate instruction within the parameters of rigorous curriculum. Another change in mindset for teachers may be the practice of including parents in collaborative planning; this is a necessary paradigm shift as evidence shows a positive correlation between parent involvement and schools successes for children (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Colorado Department of Education, 2006; Johnsen et al., 2012; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). These essentials correspond to the six components of Pennsylvania's RtI framework (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008):

1. standards-aligned instruction
2. universal screening
3. shared ownership
4. data-based decision making
5. tiered intervention and service delivery system
6. parental engagement

As noted previously, use of the RtI Model can challenge the thinking of stakeholders. Vacca (2011) developed a guidebook to assist educators as they implement an effective RtI model with gifted students. In a subsequent study that focused on the use of the guidebook to help educators understand the RtI model with gifted students, Vacca (2011) found that all participants in her study viewed the contents of her guidebook as being helpful. The guidebook consisted of a brief overview of RtI, gifted students' characteristics, similarities between RtI and gifted education, a working RtI model for all students including gifted students, and research-based interventions and strategies for gifted children at each tier.

To further support gifted students within the MTSS/RtII Framework, Fisher (2009) adapted and changed the original RtI model to accommodate the enriched/gifted learners.

Comparing Figure 1 and the RtI Model, the cone-shaped system becomes a diamond shape system to include all learners on both ends of the spectrum. Instead of three tiers as shown in Figure 1, enrichment and gifted components, as depicted in Figure 3 (Fisher, 2009) need to be implemented to create more effective tiers for all students in all schools and districts.

Fisher's additional tiers of enrichment and gifted components are in place to provide more effective intervention for gifted populations. According to Fisher, about five percent of students would be comprised of gifted students, supported in Tier 5, who would need intensive enrichment interventions with Tier 1 & 4 instruction. Approximately fifteen percent of enrichment students who fall into Tier 4 would need Tier 1 instruction and enrichment intervention, while about sixty percent of students in Tier 1 would need just the core curriculum instruction. Figure 3 shows Tamara Fisher's proposal extending the three tiered system to a multi-tiered system that would include support for gifted students and those in need of enrichment. Using this model, elementary schools' could divide Tiers 1, 2, and 3 to create Fisher's Tiers 4 and 5. Tier 4 includes academic and behavioral strategies for students who are enriched for academic achievement. Tier 5 includes practices designed for a few students who are significantly above the established grade-level benchmarks. Intensive instruction is incorporated using "best practices" for the gifted population (Fisher, 2009).

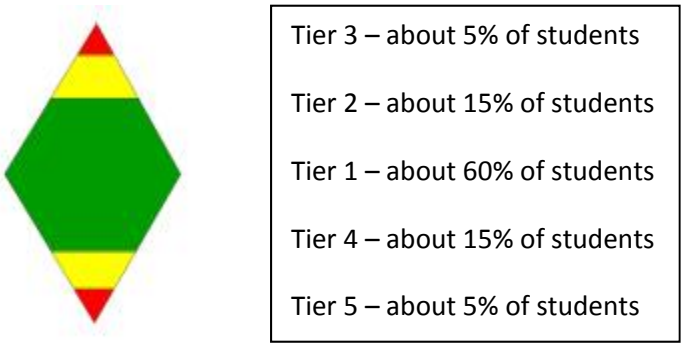

Figure 3. Adapted Response to Intervention model. Adapted from "RTI for gifted? Are you sure?!?!?" by T. Fisher, 2009. *Education Week*. Copyright 2009 by the *Education Week.*

The Challenges of including Gifted Education within an MTSS/RtII Framework

There are challenges when implementing gifted education within the MTSS/RtII Framework. To ensure its success, the MTSS/RtII Framework must be viewed systemically among all participants: learners, teachers, administrators, and families. Following is a discussion of the elements that require attention by these groups.

First, use of the universal screeners as well as the formative and curriculum based assessments dictate that the program must be inclusive in nature (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010; Johnsen et al., 2012; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008). Participants must acclimate to the major change in the process through which needs are identified. A challenging paradigm shift is the suggestion that the label of giftedness is not necessary (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Renzulli, 1999). For decades, the first step was to identify and label students as being gifted (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). With an effective MTSS/RtII Framework, there will not be a need for labels; in their absence, emphasis is placed on meeting all students' needs through enrichment and acceleration.

School budgets are another issue that, when implementing the MTSS/RtII Framework, may require a shift in mindset. Monies for gifted programs have always been an issue (Dai &

Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Friedman, 2005). New and collaborative methods for allocating funds might be needed. For instance, resources from technology funds might support distance learning, enrichment learning materials, and curriculum funds rigorous for high-ended classes. By knowingly allocating money for professional development and curricular activities, a school system demonstrates commitment and faith in the process (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008; DeNisco, 2015; Friedman, 2005; National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.).

Schools are finding a challenge with the RtI implementation and gifted education because it is difficult to implement a comprehensive, sequential framework among different grade levels and subject areas (Sousa, 2009; Sprenger, 1999; Winnebrenner, 1992).

Theoretical Framework

For this study, three theories were applied to analyze the implementation process of Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students. By incorporating the triangulation method, Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model with systems thinking were combined. The following sections define these theories and how they correlate with this research (Meadows, 2008; Renzulli, 1999; Senge, 2006).

Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness

Theories regarding gifted practices and giftedness are interconnected (Dai & Chen, 2014). Because of this, Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness concept will be implemented into this study because, like the MTSS/RtII its focus is on gifted behaviors rather than on the labels that identify students who exhibit the behaviors. It consists of three interrelated considerations: above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of

creativity. Within the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness, there is a shift from the traditional concept of "being gifted" to a focus on the development of gifted and creative behaviors with students who are at-potential and who would benefit from advanced educational opportunities, together with enrichment and acceleration experiences (Baum, Reis, & Maxfield, 1998; Coleman & Johnsen, 2013; Renzulli, 1999, 2012; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). The Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness is essential to this study because it builds a foundation on which gifted students are identified, not by an intelligence quotient (IQ) but by having such qualities as task commitment and high levels of creativity (Renzulli, 1999, 2012; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Since the Three-Ring Concept of Giftedness and the Enrichment Triad Model are interactive, the two models will be incorporated (Renzulli, 1999, 2012).

Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model

Aligned with the MTSS/RtII Framework, the curricular format of the Enrichment Triad Model (1977) could complement/support Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework. The Enrichment Triad Model was designed as a gifted program model that includes three types of enrichment. Type 1 Enrichment exposes students to a many experiences including careers, hobbies, and events that normally would be included in the regular education curriculum. Type 1 Enrichment should be motivating and created to produce new interests for use in Type II and Type III Enrichment. A team consisting of administrators, teachers, students, and parents collaborate to plan Type 1 Enrichment activities like enrichment clusters, demonstrations, and performances. Applied to the MTSS/RtII Framework, stakeholders design Type 1 Enrichment could correlate with Tier 1 for all students. Materials and methods are created to encourage the development of strong and independent thinking skills. Its purpose is to enhance creative high

order thinking skills, and verbal and nonverbal communication skills (Coleman & Johnsen, 2013; Renzulli, 2012).

Type II Enrichment includes materials and methods implemented to promote the following: creative thinking and problem solving, critical thinking and affective processes, a wide variety of specific learning skills, use of advanced- level reference materials, and written, oral, and visual communication skills. Type II Enrichment is more precise and is based on Type I Enrichment interests and activities. This is accomplished by compacting the curriculum and is correlated to Tier 2 of the MTSS/RtII Framework. Type III Enrichment allows students to further study self-selected areas and commit the time to be first-hand inquiry investigators (Coleman & Johnsen, 2013; Renzulli, 2012). As both are based on a multi-level disciplinary system, the Enrichment Triad Model correlates well with the goals of Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework.

Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model interface well with the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted pedagogy. Each member of this triad is based on research and science; each also outlines the essential components for a comprehensive school enrichment model to be successful for all students (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Friedman, 2005; Johnsen et al., 2012). By implementing Renzulli's theories with Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework, elementary schools have the ability to provide an innovative system that meets the needs of high achievers. As noted earlier, participants must embrace a change in their perceptions of gifted education. If the research-based, MTSS/RtII Framework, can meet the needs of the all students, then it is equally constructed to meet the needs of gifted students (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). When the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted education

combine, there is an early intervention, prior to formal identification, based on students' strengths; this practice allows teachers to see first the potential in all students and then to work toward effectively accommodating and enriching their learning experiences (Coleman & Johnsen, 2012, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012; Renzulli, 1999, 2012). The tiers are sequential and assist the gifted learner across general and gifted education. Data driven assessments guide gifted instruction and are important components of meeting the gifted students' needs through a challenging curriculum (Assouline et al., 2015; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Dai & Chen 2014; Davis, 2006; Friedman, 2005).

Renzulli's theories, the MTSS/RtII Framework, and gifted education are all systems-based and their concepts are interrelated. In order to effectively blend three separate but similar systems, stakeholders will benefit from including in their mindset the idea of "systems thinking." As the term implies, systems thinking helps participants view/work with multiple systems as one unit and to work cohesively toward goals embraced by all. Not only does the Renzulli's theories share common goals and processes with Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted education, but they also share aspects of systems thinking.

Systems Thinking

Change is challenging but systemic change is even more challenging. The theoretical framework of systems thinking defines how combining multiple systems can be more effective when approached in a collaborative and organized manner. "Systems work," "systems thinking," and "systemic change" are terms that have been discussed in literature for years, but this perspective has only recently been promoted as being applicable in schools and school districts (Hall & Hord, 2011; Meadows, 2005; Senge, 2006). According to *Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: Improving Education for all Students, Connecticut's Framework for RTI*

*(*August 2008), "SRBI are systemic, requiring the leadership of school and district administrators to communicate a clear vision and coherent plan for improved student outcomes. This systemic approach ensures that all teachers are working toward common goals and that all students receive instruction in the same core competencies regardless of which teacher they happen to have" (pp. 16-17). In implementing change, it seems reasonable to consider all the parts of the system even when attempting to change only one or two elements (Hall & Hord, 2011; Lunenberg, 2011; Meadows, 2005; Senge, 2006).

Theorists and practitioners have regularly pointed out the fallacy of not engaging in thinking about the entire system (Hall & Hord, 2011; Meadow, 2008; Rollins et al., 2009; Senge, 2006). Common sense suggests that, in a system of interrelated elements in this case, interdependent student groups, neglecting one part of the whole will assuredly affect other parts. If the focus is on one group, e.g., struggling learners, it stands to reason that groups receiving little attention and whose needs are unknown, will not perform to their potential. Thus, in today's climate of addressing the challenge of organizational improvement, especially among school districts, attention to all the parts of the system is highly beneficial. Interconnectedness and interrelationships must prosper for the system to operate effectively and efficiently. There are multiple parts to any organization; in educational settings the systems approach requires consideration of all learners (Hall & Hord, 2011; Lunenberg, 2011; Meadows, 2011; Senge, 2006). This theoretical framework is particularly important because it builds understanding of the process by which the MTSS/RtII Framework can improve gifted education.

Lunenberg (2011) emphasized seven important considerations, from Senge's work, for school leaders as they embrace a systems thinking approach. The first is the need to provide continuous learning opportunities. The next six elements promote inquiry and dialogue,

collaboration and team learning, the development of systems to capture and share learning, empowerment of participants towards a collective vision, connections between the organization and its environment, and presence of strategic leadership for learning (Prager, 2015, p. 47).

Lunenberg's (2011) first consideration, the need for continuous learning involves professional development and long term follow up; it is this practice that will expand and solidify the capacity to support the changes inherent in the MTSS/RtII Framework. Because teachers are not required to learn gifted teaching strategies or how to use data analysis to support gifted students, some educators may have received little or no training regarding the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted education. In fact, in most states, gifted education has never been a required course in teacher education programs (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008; Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006). According to the National Association of Gifted Children (n.d.), a survey was conducted and revealed the following: only three states require general education teachers to have some type of training in gifted education, in eight states it is estimated that 5% or fewer of general education teachers in those states receive annual professional development in gifted education, only 17 states require teachers in gifted programs to a earn gifted education credential, and three states require administrators to receive training in the needs of gifted students as part of their endorsement certification.

To promote inquiry and dialogue, the second consideration for school administrators, (Lunenberg, 2011) data based decision making, is a shared activity. "It involves problem solving similar to the MTSS/RtII approach. Baseline information is collected on a student's academic progress, an intervention is applied, more data are collected, and decisions are made about the effectiveness of the intervention. Progress monitoring has potential to generate new effective interventions for all students. Research support allows teachers to select effective programs,

materials, and standards aligned strategies for gifted students" (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). The instruction is therefore based on their needs and derived from student interests and questions. Teachers and students also learn that, contrary to common misconception, books support curriculum and are not the curriculum themselves. Real life activities are integrated to make this learning meaningful to all learners (Perkins, 2009; Searle, 2010). All of these activities, and benefits they provide to learners, are attainable when inquiry and dialogue are encouraged among team members.

A natural consequence of inquiry and dialogue is Lunenberg's third consideration of collaboration and team learning (2011). For scientific research-based intervention like the MTSS/RtII Framework to be successful for all learners including gifted students, all stakeholders must collaborate and work toward commonly accepted outcomes (Assouline et al., 2015; Davis, 2006; Winebrenner, 1992). This practice includes school professionals and parents; the team identifies research-based practices in gifted education and develops decision points for more intensive services as needed. The team also evaluates and implements appropriate assessment tools and strategies (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Davis, 2006; Demirsky & Goddard, 2010; Friedman, 2005).

Lunenberg's fourth consideration, incorporating systems to capture and share learning, leads to an evolution in thinking among participants. From earlier ideas that RtI is another "add-on" to what is already being done in the classroom, members learn that, with appropriate application, RtI consists of reviewing instructional practices to determines strategies that are effective. Educators need to replace ineffective practices with research-based best practices (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Davis, 2006; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010).

To empower people toward a collective vision, as postulated by Lunenberg (2011), team members benefit greatly from curricular and instructional support by the school leadership. With this support, more students will have their academic, social, and emotional needs met in Tier 1. the success there is a greater chance that appropriate support can occur at the Tier 1 level (Bender & Shores, 2007; Callender, 2012; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

In order to make connections to the organization in its environment, the sixth of Lunenberg's considerations, the MTSS/RtII Framework needs to become a routine part of general education, accepted by all members as a means to success for every child. Lunenberg's final consideration, that the presence of a strategic leadership for learning is essential to the success of RtI, asserts that administrators need to know how to implement and interpret MTSS/RtII methods and data. Because differentiated strategies within Tier 1 are the cornerstone of RtI, proficiency in its implementation is crucial (Bender & Shores, 2007; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Callender, 2012; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). With administrative support, and with the proficiency of a cohesive, like-minded team, adding depth and complexity to differentiated instruction in areas of content, acceleration, individual study, student choice activities, above level activities, curriculum compacting, and tiered assignments, will enhance gifted learning (Boswell & Carlile, 2010; Dai & Chen, 2014; Davis, 2006; Renzulli, 1999).

In a study, *Initial Development of a Procedural Guide for Implementing Response to Intervention with Gifted Elementary School Students* (Robertson, 2012), the researcher explained that curriculum must meet the needs of gifted students. All educators need to be stakeholders in this responsibility. "Instead of 'wait to fail,' as the old exceptional student model was called, in

the case of the gifted students it has been traditionally been 'waiting to be challenged'" (Robertson, 2012, p. 18).

To provide a strategic leadership for learning so students are not in a waiting room that passes for a classroom, administrators need to assist the gifted education teachers with "general education in implementing varied interventions and in assessment information to determine their effectiveness. Management techniques might include the use of flexible grouping, activities, student record keeping, learning stations, and scheduling" (Hughes et al., 2009, p. 60). To implement the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students, a universal screener should be used for all who are achieving at a high level (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Johnsen et al., 2012). When using the MTSS/RtII, regular education teachers will still be the most crucial component of students' achievement; even so, administrators need to be the implementers and change makers. Frameworks like the MTSS/RtII Framework can be successful with gifted learners but, for optimum benefit, they have to be assimilated as a systemic process that leads to systemic change (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; DuFour & Marzano, 2011, Friedman, 2005).

Summary

This literature demonstrates that a measurable tiered instructional system is essential to elementary schools. Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework is a sequential system that is also research-based for teaching gifted students. Research determines that implementing processes, like the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted education requires that administrators assume an active role in implementation (Callender, 2012; Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Friedman, 2005; Johnsen et al., 2012). The research on RtI is evident but there but few studies found based on Pennsylvania school administrators' perceptions regarding the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. With combining these topics, the researcher will shed light on

another opportunity for gifted students. Looking into the implementation process from administrators employing the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted education could assist other elementary schools in a more systematic approach to teach gifted students. In Chapter Three, a list of methods and procedures for this study regarding developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students will be defined.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter Three, methods and procedures will be defined to learn more about the perceptions of Pennsylvania elementary administrators who have developed the MTSS/RtII Framework components with gifted elementary students. The focal point of the study is the perceptions of Pennsylvania administrators responsible for the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. Qualitative research information will be defined and the interview process will be described. The last section will be based on the sample selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis (Prager, 2015).

Qualitative Research

A qualitative approach was used to obtain more information regarding the perceptions of elementary administrators regarding Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted elementary students. This method was effective for the study because of the emotions and feelings that dealt with the connections regarding the framework with gifted elementary students in different schools in Pennsylvania. The researcher chose qualitative research because of the need to present a detailed topic and advocating a need for possible change (Creswell, 2005). This study described elementary administrators' perceptions regarding Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted elementary students.

The purposive sampling method was implemented for the selection of elementary administrators. "In purposive sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2005, p. 204). Elementary schools and administrators had to meet the following criteria:

1. The administrators are presently developing Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students.
2. Elementary administrators had to serve at least three years in their current positions and in the same school. This time allotment would gave administrators time enough to develop the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students and be seen as "change agents" (Fullan, 2007).
3. Participant schools had been developing Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. The names of school districts and elementary schools were given to the researcher by a Pennsylvania statewide gifted liaison.

Because the researcher wanted to investigate attitudes, interests, and concerns (Creswell, 2005, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009), interviews were the preferable method. By creating structured and open-ended questions, a semi-structured interview was conducted. Due to the flexibility of a semi-structured interview, the researcher can vary questions as information is shared (Gay et al., 2009). Gathering information from different administrators, the researcher obtained knowledge of their perceptions about Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with elementary gifted students.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theories were researched from the topics of giftedness and systems thinking. By combining systems thinking with Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Theory, this study describes a sequential, research-based approach to this topic. These theories were the basis for the elementary administrator interview questions. Since incorporating the gifted students in Pennsylvania's MTSS/ RtII Framework is a relatively new concept for administrators (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2014; Johnsen et al.,

2014), several interview questions are connected to the perceived effectiveness of the framework's components. With administrators developing and leading the MTSS/RtII Framework, their responsibility was essential in the implementation and sustainability of the similar frameworks (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Friedman, 2005).

Curriculum change can have a major impact on administrators, teachers, and students. A systems thinking approach is a change concept that is somewhat new in educational research (Lunenberg, 2011; Meadows, 2010; Preuss, 2003; Senge, 2006). With systems like the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted elementary students, different components are evident (Friedman, 2005). Systems thinking is an approach to organizational improvement based on the whole, the part, and the interactions between the two (Preuss, 2003). Through the interview process, the researcher noted the importance of a systems approach like the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students.

This is the first time in education, every child will be measured for proficiency in Reading and Math (United States Department of Education, 2004). Students will learn to higher standards in better schools. Schools must not only offer an education but they must ensure that authentic learning is taking place (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Yasher, 2013). Interview questions were created to link one of the theories, Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness, Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Theory, and/or systems thinking to Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. Since the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and the Enrichment Triad Theory are interactive, both will be combined during both research and reporting phases of this study.

"In order to confirm the accuracy of qualitative research, several methods may be applied. Creswell (2005) described such procedures as: triangulation, rich and thick description,

member checks, clarifying researcher bias, peer review, negative case analysis, external audits, and observation as ways to verify the correctness of one's findings. Of these, the researcher will clarify researcher bias, use member checks to verify data. Using multiple methods will enable the researcher to collect information and triangulate the data to confirm findings" (Prager, 2015, p.56). Investigators want to contribute data that is believable and trustworthy. Qualitative researchers employ a variety of means to address issues of verification. Reliability denotes the magnitude at which the researcher can replicate the findings. It is challenging in the social sciences because human behavior is never static (Creswell, 2005, 2007; Gay et al., 2009; Yasher, 2013). The research data for this study included interview questions and answers. This researcher maintained a chain of evidence, or audit trail, during the duration of the project (Yasher, 2013).

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the direction of this study:

1. What are the perceptions of Pennsylvania's elementary administrators on the use of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) / Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) Framework with gifted students?
2. What are the perceptions of the Pennsylvania's elementary administrators in regards to the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students' data analysis and alignment of instruction?
3. What underlying themes emerge from interviews with Pennsylvania elementary administrators about the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students?

Participants

Participants for this study were administrators who were currently developing the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. For this study, an elementary school is identified as a public school K-5 (Lambert, 1998). Because of the nature of this study, purposeful sampling was also used. First, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) was contacted by phone, email, and in-person to obtain confirmation that elementary schools were developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students.

A meeting was also set up with a Pennsylvania Department of Education's statewide gifted support liaison to obtain a list of elementary schools in Pennsylvania that were developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. The list consisted of four school districts that were developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students; these districts were comprised of 14 elementary schools. The pool of candidates for this study was reduced further when the criterion, of at least three years of administrative experience in their current positions, was considered. Eventually for this study, there were 10 potential participants, with seven finally participating.

Setting

Interviews were set up by elementary administrators in different school districts across Pennsylvania. The administrator interviews took place in locations preferred by the participants. Conducting interviews at the administrators' building was optimal, as it was likely to be the most comfortable setting for the participants (Creswell, 2005).

Instrumentation

A combination of more and less structured questions design semi-structured interviews. Questions were fluid in nature, appearing to be guided conversations rather than structured

inquiries (Creswell, 2007; Gay et al., 2009). Participation was voluntary. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviews were tape recorded with permission and then, further transcribed. The researcher used interviews to investigate administrators' perceptions regarding the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with the gifted elementary students in their elementary schools/districts. Schools and participants will remain confidential, protecting their privacy.

The interview questions were field tested by some Pennsylvania elementary administrators who, while not involved in this study, met the necessary criteria for participation and were involved in Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. The purpose of the field test was to get feedback regarding possible improvements/changes to the interview questions before the actual interviews (Creswell, 2005).

Each pilot interview was completed either over the telephone, through email, or in face-to-face conversations and lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. Field test participants were encouraged to provide feedback regarding question structure, sequence, and clarity. Based on the feedback, suggestions were noted. Interview questions can be found in the Appendix.

Interview questions correlate with the research questions. Each interview question is linked to one of the research questions. This alignment is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Alignment of Interview and Research Questions

Interview questions	Research question	Applicable theory
1. How long has your school implemented the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students?	RQ 1	Systems thinking

2. Describe how the implementation of the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students has changed the way gifted services are provided.	RQ 1	Systems thinking
3. Describe the universal screener used, and the screening process for identifying gifted students.	RQ 2	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness /Triad Enrichment Model
4. How is the progress monitoring implemented with the gifted students?	RQ 2	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness/Triad Enrichment Model
5. How is differentiated instruction implemented with the gifted students in general education?	RQ 2	Systems thinking
6. How are parents more involved in the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students?	RQ 3	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness / Triad Enrichment Model
7. Describe the positive and negative features of the MTSS/RtII Framework with elementary gifted students.	RQ 1	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness /Triad Enrichment Model
8. How has a focus on high quality instruction changed classrooms to meet the needs of gifted students?	RQ 2	Systems thinking
9. Describe the collaborative efforts among teachers and parents within the MTSS/RtII Framework regarding gifted instruction and outcomes.	RQ 2	Systems thinking
10. How is your school meeting gifted students' needs through the MTSS/RtII Framework?	RQ 3	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness / Enrichment Triad Model

11. Compare the value of professional development for you and the teachers regarding gifted education before and after the MTSS/RtII implementation.	RQ 3	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness / Triad Enrichment Model
12. Explain how the MTSS/RtII Framework is effective for the gifted students.	RQ 3	Systems thinking

Procedures

In the fall of 2015, primary contacts were made with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN). After a list of elementary schools was obtained from a Pennsylvania statewide gifted liaison, the participant selection started.

The initial protocol for this study was submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Upon approval from the IRB, potential participants were contacted by phone. During these calls and additional email messages, the study was explained and participant questions answered. An introduction letter and an informed consent form (Appendix A) were then sent to potential participants. When all of the informed consent forms had been returned, participants were contacted through phone calls and emails to schedule a date, time, and location for a one-hour interview. The interviews were transcribed and checked by participants for verification before data analysis occurred.

Data Collection

The data collection phase of this study was in the winter of 2015/2016. Interview transcriptions were analyzed manually by the researcher. The purpose was to look for themes or

common threads between responses. Relevant quotes were highlighted and noted. Coding categories resulted by analyzing the repetitive themes located in the transcriptions. Additionally, demographic information was found on participant school district websites. School district data were presented in Table 4 and Table 5.

Interviews

The interviews were allotted for 60 minutes and were completed in locations that participants preferred. When the researcher received approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, permission letters were sent to initiate research regarding their respective schools to elementary schools developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with elementary gifted students. Before the interviews, the researcher reviewed this study's purpose with each participant. Questions were also answered related to the study.

All interviews were recorded which gave time for the researcher to write notes and allowed the participants to discuss areas more deeply. The researcher reviewed the recordings and written notes taken during each interview. Interviews were transcribed and coded as themes and categories surfaced. Grouping themes and categories was done throughout the process and reviewed again as information was processed.

"Describing and developing themes from the data consists of answering the major research questions and forming an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon through description and thematic development (Creswell, 2005, p. 241). Ryan and Bernard (2001) wrote an article titled "Techniques to Identify Themes in Qualitative Data". In this article, theme identification is viewed as one of the most fundamental aspects of qualitative research. Different coding techniques for identifying themes were listed; these included "word repetitions, indigenous categories, key-words-in-context (KWIC), compare and contrast, social science

queries, searching for missing information, metaphors and analogies, transitions, connectors, unmarked texts, pawing, and cutting and sorting" (Ryan & Bernard, 2001). For this study, to discover as many themes as possible, techniques that incorporated the line-by-line basis were used. These methods included compare and contrast, querying the text, and examining absences. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), three ways can be identified as consenus themes when the majority of the administrators state the same theme, supported themes is when approximately half of the administrators state the same theme, and an individual theme is categorized when only one or two individuals state the same theme. The themes for this study were defined when five to seven subjects supported it. For this study, if a word, statement, or idea was repeated at least five times, it became a theme. If a word, statement, or idea was mentioned in the research in previous chapters or considered an outlier, it was referenced. The researcher typed the transcript from the interviews and in one week of the actual interview, emailed the participant's transcript for review. Every participant was able to review and verify the accuracy of the transcript. The transcription of each interview seeking clarification of the accuracy of the interview was emailed to each respondent. This member checking technique validates the findings (Creswell, 2005, 2007; Gay et al., 2009, Prager, 2015).

Summary

Chapter Three defined methods for the research design, research site, instrument, and data analysis. This study's purpose was to research administrators' perceptions regarding Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with the gifted elementary students. The researcher acquired data from interviews. The researcher also addressed the issues of validity and reliability through a process of multiple sources of evidence and converging lines of inquiry. In Chapter Four, the researcher presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Chapter Four presents the relevant data and themes that surfaced through administrator interviews involved in Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. Participant interviews are classified according to Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model, augmented by systems thinking as described by Meadows (2006) and Senge (2006) to obtain insights on how these theories connect to the roles of administrators as they implement the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework in elementary schools. In the book, *Conceptions of Giftedness*, Renzulli (2005) stated, "one of the first and most important issues that should be dealt with in a search for the meaning of giftedness is that there must be a purpose for defining this concept. In view of the practical applications for which a definition might be used, it is necessary to consider any definition in the larger context of overall programming for the target population we are attempting to serve" (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005, p. 248). Not only are the theories relevant in this study noteworthy but also the impact that curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments, and collaboration/leadership may have on Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework as it is used with gifted elementary students.

Imbedded in this discussion of Renzulli's models are concurrent references to "systems thinking." "Lunenberg (2011), based off of the work of Senge, established seven important considerations for school leaders within a systems thinking approach: offer continuous learning opportunities; promote inquiry and dialogue; encourage collaboration and team learning; create systems to capture and share learning; empower people towards a collective vision; connect organization to its environment; and provide strategic leadership for learning will also be identified" (Prager, 2015). These elements will add to the coming discussion of this study's findings.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study's purpose was to investigate the administrators' perceptions on the use of MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students in Pennsylvania. For the sake of providing contextual background, the following describes the roots of the MTSS/RtII: the Response to Intervention Model has been used as an alternative to the discrepancy model for special education decision-making since the 1960s. Pennsylvania's RtI Framework (2005) changed to the Response to Instruction and Intervention Model in 2009 to emphasize the instructional piece (along with its intervention components) and, more currently, has evolved into the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, an umbrella model that includes the Pennsylvania's Core Standards, the Pennsylvania's Educator Effectiveness Model, and the Pennsylvania's Value-Added Assessment System designed to, reform first, the way school professionals are evaluated and second, the critical components of training and professional growth (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a.; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.). These changes have had an impact on gifted education in that they have exposed deficits in the attention paid to the needs of advanced learners. Of significance is the fact that, through MTSS/RtII, such changes are being initiated by school administrators. It is the direct involvement of administrators in the implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework that renders their perceptions of the model significant and worthy of study.

The elementary administrators' perceptions were investigated regarding the MTSS/RtII Framework as it is used among gifted students. While the MTSS/RtII Framework consists of myriad elements, this study's goal was focused on the perceptions of the model, as it is used with gifted students, among Pennsylvania school administrators. Knowledge gained from this study can produce effective implementation of gifted education by administrators across Pennsylvania

and other states. This study may lead to the accurate identification of high achieving students and the implementation of more effective gifted programs. The following questions built the foundation for the investigation:

1. What are the perceptions of Pennsylvania's elementary administrators on the use of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) / Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) Framework with gifted students?
2. What are the perceptions of the Pennsylvania's elementary administrators in regards to the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted student data analysis and alignment of instruction?
3. What underlying themes emerge from interviews with Pennsylvania elementary administrators about the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students?

Data Analysis

Through qualitative methods, data were compiled. By interviewing participants that met the criteria, the researcher was able to investigate the perceptions of seven administrators in four school districts comprised collectively of nine elementary schools in Pennsylvania. Interviews were completed after the collection of school information about each school district and school. A gifted liaison for the state of Pennsylvania gave the researcher a list of the schools charged with developing the MTSS/RtII Framework in elementary schools.

The researcher analyzed data, looking for patterns and identifying possible themes. Results were subject to repeated categorization and synthesis throughout the analysis process. In order to draw meaningful conclusions, organized data were sorted into groups. According to Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2009), "The researcher must fully examine each piece of information

and, building on insights and hunches gained during the data collection, attempt to make sense of the data as a whole" (p. 449).

The researcher followed specific steps throughout the data analysis process. Recordings from each interview were reviewed for accuracy. The transcripts for each interview were reviewed by the researcher before being checked by each participant (Creswell, 2005, 2007). After participants checked their transcripts, themes were identified and found throughout the transcripts and notes. All transcripts were read several times and the researcher coded the contents according to the themes that were repeated. Transcriptions from each interview and the researcher's interview notes were kept on file (Prager, 2015, p. 66).

From this analysis, three themes emerged: curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments, and collaboration/leadership. These themes were apparent because ideas, concepts, and statements were mentioned at least five times within the seven interviews. Similar threads were also found within the literature review (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2013; Johnsen, Sulak & Rollins, 2012), lending credence to the findings of this study. Results will be shared later in this chapter.

School Sites

This study's focus was on seven administrators who were developing the MTSS/RtII Framework in four school districts in Pennsylvania and nine elementary schools. It was crucial to research general information about each school and school district and pertinent data for each participant. The next sections present information regarding school district information. The percentage of gifted students identified will also serve as a foundation for this analysis.

School District A is a small, rural school district that spans two counties. Students attend two separate elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools but graduate as one school

district. It covers about 110 square miles. The district's five buildings (one school is a combined middle/high school) serve 1634 students. Forty-seven percent of School District A's students are economically disadvantaged. The demographics for these students include 94% Caucasian, 2% African American, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% Hispanic, and 2% Multi-Racial. Five percent of students are identified as being gifted.

School District B is a large, rural/suburban public school district. Geographically, it covers four townships across 103 square miles. District B is home to seven elementary buildings, two middle schools and one high school. Student enrollment is 8397. Student demographics include 79% Caucasian, 2% African American, 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% Hispanic, and 4% Multi-Racial. Eighteen percent of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged and 5% are identified as gifted.

School District C is a mid-sized, rural public school about ten miles from the Maryland border. The district includes three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. School District C spans one borough and about six townships, and encompasses about 180 square miles. Of approximately 2994 students, 80% are Caucasian, 6% are African American, 1% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 12% are Hispanic, and 1% are Multi-Racial. Forty-three percent of students that are economically disadvantaged and 7% identified as gifted.

School District D covers nine boroughs and two townships. It borders the Ohio River and is twelve miles northwest of Pittsburgh. It encompasses 24 square miles and is home to about 1941 students enrolled in two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The economically disadvantaged rate is 15%. Student enrollment is 86% Caucasian, 4% African American, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% Hispanic, and 5% Multi-Racial. The percentage of students identified as gifted is 0%.

Table 4

School Information

School Districts	Elementary School	Enrollment	ED	Gifted
School District A	1. Elementary School	474	53%	3%
	2. Elementary School	272	45%	2%
School District B	1. Elementary School	663	14%	1%
	2. Elementary School	507	17%	1%
School District C	1. Elementary School	432	50%	4%
	2. Elementary School	394	48%	3%
	3. Elementary school	423	53%	8%
School District D	1. Elementary School	461	16%	0%
	2. Elementary School	358	18%	0%

Table 5

Student Demographics

Schools	% African American	% Asian/ Pacific Islander	% Caucasian	% Hispanic	% Multi-Racial
School A-1	2	1	92	1	4
School A-2	0	0	95	1	4
School B-1	2	11	80	2	5
School B-2	2	10	80	4	4
School C-1	7	2	75	14	2
School C-2	4	2	82	11	1
School C-3	9	2	75	12	2
School D-1	1	2	89	2	6
School D-2	6	2	83	2	7

Note: all values are presented as estimated percentages

In addition to the compilation of general school data provided by Pennsylvania's Department of Education, the researcher also reviewed, for the purpose of confirming the above statistics, basic information related to each participant as presented on the school district websites and other public data sources. Additionally, some data were shared during participant interviews.

Participant Demographic Information

Inherent in any discussion of perceptions must be an allowance for the influence of demographic similarities/differences among participants. The following information describes interviewees. Four categories related to the subjects were examined: gender, ethnicity, highest level of education attained, and years as an administrator in his/her current position. First, all of the participants were Caucasian with only one being male. Participants had earned their Bachelor's Degrees, Master's Degrees, and additional Administrative Certificates: three of the participants also attained doctoral degrees. Years of experience in their current positions ranged from four to 20 years.

Findings

Several findings were noted through interview data analysis. This procedure investigated how administrators perceive the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students in Pennsylvania. Data analysis also showed that the implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework and the ways in which Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model with systems thinking were evident.

Participant responses were compiled to assist other administrators developing the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework or a similar intervention model. The results identified the relevance of Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977)

Enrichment Triad Model, with systems thinking, when meeting the needs of gifted populations. This study's results identified the perceived relevance of the three primary categories: curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments, and collaboration/leadership. Themes will be examined as they relate to Research Question 3.

Research Question 1

The first research question for this study focused on the perceptions of administrators on the use of Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. Since the implementation of the NCLB (2001) and, more recently, Pennsylvania's Core standards, the Educator Effectiveness Model, and Pennsylvania's Value-Added Assessment System in the state of Pennsylvania (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2003; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a.; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.), there have been significant changes in education. In *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom*, Susan Winebrenner (1992) stated, "It may surprise you to find that in a class that has a range of abilities, it is the most able, rather than the least able, who will learn less new material than any other group" (p.1). The participants in this study all mentioned meeting the needs of the gifted students as a concern, but most were optimistic when discussing the relationship between the MTSS/RtII components and the support for gifted children. Following is a discussion of mindset and two elements that surfaced as being a direct effect of implementation of MTSS/RtII in the districts served by the study respondents.

Mindset

Respondents alluded to practices in the education of gifted students that were common before the implementation of MTSS/RtII. Traditionally, gifted students had been pulled out to work with the gifted teacher for specific amounts of time each week. Implementing the

MTSS/RtII Framework encouraged schools to look for what is best for all students including the gifted students; such interventions include differentiated instruction, curriculum compacting, acceleration/enrichment in the regular classrooms, and tiered intervention time. Two participants mentioned that the Educator Effectiveness Model now holds all educators accountable for teaching all students including the gifted students. The academic growth of this group is, as with other groups, measured and calculated as part of teachers' evaluations. One participant also noted that:

> …the state projected scores and how the school district realized that the advanced students were not growing. This score also affects teachers' evaluations now so teachers are more willing to share ownership of their gifted students as well. The evidence showed what needed to happen and teachers are working together (with the framework) to try to make that happen.

Two administrators specifically used the term "mindset" in their discussions of the changes wrought by MTSS/RtII. All participants mentioned that, in developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students, they believed that a different mindset also had to develop among teachers and parents.

Further supporting the value of mindset, in the study, "Implementation of Total School Cluster Grouping: A Case Study" based on cluster grouping, almost all participants found the implementation of cluster grouping to be successful. Perception of teacher buy-in and use of cluster grouping was split. The teachers that bought into the idea of cluster grouping were pleased about the improved test scores and increased number of students moving into the high clusters. Those teachers who did not buy-in were unhappy with their assigned group of teachers (Necciai, 2013).

Table 6 demonstrates a fixed mindset compared to a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006, p. 245). These two mindsets exemplify the systems thinking approach wherein there is interconnectedness among systems (Meadows, 2008). For example, with the growth mindset system, teachers could embrace the challenge of teaching their gifted students and using data for tiered interventions (while this is time-consuming, teachers see it as being advantageous and worthy of persistency). According to the reports of a pair of participants, teachers may start to notice gifted students mastering more challenging concepts through creative ways in their interventions even as they hear other teachers express disapproval of the MTSS/RtII Framework. The administration expressed the opinion that, if all students were progress-monitored and showed growth and task commitment as a result of the MTSS/RtII process, other teachers would be inspired to implement the components of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students. Such systems thinking also lends itself to Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness. According to this model, three components needed to produce gifted behavior: above average ability in some areas, creativity, and task commitment. In the previous teacher scenario, students were above average according to data, they showed creativity through tiered intervention, and they demonstrated growth which could be attributed to task commitment (completing the task). Table 6 demonstrates the Two Mindsets Model.

Table 6

Two Mindsets

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
For people who demonstrate a fixed mindset:	For people who demonstrate a growth mindset:
1. Challenges are avoided.	1. Challenges are welcomed.

2. The chance to overcome obstacles is not attempted or attempted minimally. 3. View effort as worthless. 4. Criticism is not taken into consideration. 5. Intimidated by the success of others. Result: People who demonstrate a fixed mindset do not fulfill their fullest potentials which provides them with a "deterministic view of the world".	2. The chance to overcome obstacles is done with persistence. 3. View effort as part of 'mastery". 4. Criticism is the basis for learning. 5. Inspired by the success of others. Result: People who demonstrate a growth mindset reach their fullest potentials which provides them with a "greater sense of will".

Note. Adapted from "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success," by C.S. Dweck, 2006. Ballatine. p. 245. Copyright 2006 by *Ballatine Books.*

This systematic way of thinking can also assist with parents. All participants mentioned that initially, when including gifted students in the MTSS/RtII Framework, parents were concerned for different reasons: one was that they could no longer have an elitist attitude; the second was that gifted services would not be provided to their children. The MTSS/RtII Framework assists with early identification and intervention for all students. Parents do not feel as if they have to fight for a label if their children's needs are being met. Referring to the Holmes diagram, parents with the growth mindset embrace the challenge and trust the school to meet the needs of their gifted children even as other parents express opposition to the idea. Parents are noticing the effectiveness of the intervention system with their gifted children. Even though the elitism mentality is diminished, administrators reported that other parents are noticing the improvements with their gifted children. As evidenced here, higher levels of creativity and task commitment on assessments for the students are producing more effective collaboration

between the parents, teachers, and administrators leading to a shared ownership for the success of the child.

Use of Labels and Universal Screeners

Another perception among this study's participants was that the MTSS/RtII Framework enables all students to receive enrichment and acceleration as needed. A student does not need a gifted label to be challenged. This concept is also based on Renzulli's (1977) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness Theory that a gifted student should not only be labeled gifted by an intelligence quotient (IQ) but by having other qualities such as high levels of creativity. According to this theory, gifted behavior results from interactions among three characteristics: high creativity, high task commitment (i.e., motivation), and at least above average (not necessarily outstanding) intellectual ability (Davis, 2006). Renzulli's Three-Ring Model is displayed as three overlapping circles (Figure 4).

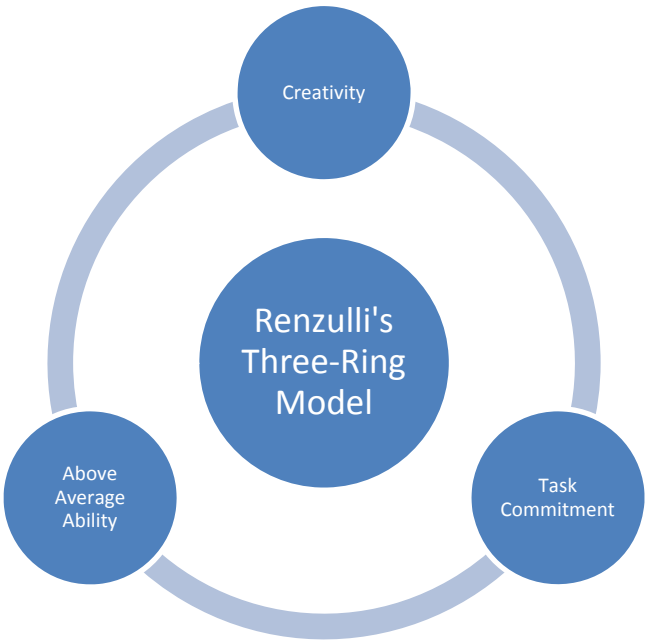

Figure 4. Renzulli's Three-Ring model. Adapted from Gifted Children Gifted Education by G. Davis, 2006. Copyright 2006 by *Great Potential Press, Inc.*

Participant 5 stated, “We are finding more and more kids benefit [from the MTSS/RtII Framework] not just the gifted students. We are sharing the wealth.” Participant 6 replied:

> Our district does not provide the goodies, the field trips (for just gifted students). A gifted IEP (used to be) the ticket to the goodies and you don’t get the goodies if you don’t have the ticket. We eliminated that and goodies are good for everyone and we focused on how to make that happen. We just moved the everyday kind of things to make that happen, so the mechanics, or schedule, time transportation are all manageable things. We move the variables like a Rubik’s cube and don’t need traditional time constraints, paperwork and documentation, and advocacy work to start to move the variables in that Rubik’s cube (to meet all students’ needs).

Students do not have to wait for a gifted evaluation under the Pennsylvania School Code, Chapter 16, or to follow the requirements or procedures to meet the needs of potential and identified students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.c.). The talented students’ needs can be met immediately following the procedures of the MTSS/RtII Framework. “With the MTSS/RtII Framework, there is a specific protocol for gifted identification,” Participant 1 stated, “…the traditional way there was no protocol; if someone requested, there was an evaluation done in the traditional way. It was an IQ test. Even with the MTSS/RtII Framework and the tiered approach, there is still going to be an evaluation at the end of the day.”

A participant mentioned finding the right protocols to use “to get down to the nitty gritty to get substantial information” for gifted students. All administrators stated that gifted evaluations are completed for students but that students no longer need to wait to be identified before being challenged through the MTSS/RtII Framework. “I don’t think we can stress strongly enough how much time we save not arguing if a child is gifted or not gifted. It actually

just doesn't matter" states Participant 6, "If they are topping off in Math, we give them the next grade; if they can read better than anyone else in the room, they get special attention. That we eliminated the identification in giving kids what they need and I didn't meet a parent who wasn't happy about not having to wait 60 days for an evaluation and come to a formal meeting and have invitations. We calculated and it saved us about a hundred hours a year and we program comprehensively as a result."

According to Renzulli's Enrichment Triad Model (1977) "the relationship between the gifted education movement and the areas of creativity training has grown so strong in recent years that many people are using the words 'gifted' and 'creative' synonymously. The marriage between these two areas is not totally without justification. One of the major characteristics of most creativity training materials is that they allow for essentially open-ended responses, thus enabling brighter or more informed persons to ascend to higher levels of fluency, flexibility, and originality in the process of divergent problem solving" (p.27).

All respondents mentioned that a universal screener is utilized with all students for screening and early identification. Two school districts have developed matrices, both of which are very involved. They deal with a point system to assess for potential giftedness. The schools look for literacy and math cutoff, as well as threshold scores. According to Participant 4, regarding the universal screener used, "it is quite involved and we keep evolving that. We start with a lot of the common district benchmark data that we do and diagnostic data and we look at scores accordingly. We do get information from teachers, of course, and parents as well." Because gifted students usually have mastered some standards, the schools incorporate curriculum compacting, rubrics on project based assessments, acceleration, and grade skipping, all of which align with some interventions within Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model and

the MTSS/RtII Tiers II and III. Some participants added that their elementary schools also use Aimsweb, Classroom Diagnostic Tests, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (Dibels), 4 sight, Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT), Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, Study Island, and other data to help make their determination for gifted identification. The following table demonstrates possible universal screener/data and purpose:

Table 7

Possible Universal Screeners and Purpose

Universal Screener	Possible Purpose
Aimsweb	To progress monitor students and use as a data management system for reading and math performances
Classroom Diagnostic Tools	To provide a brief overview of how students are performing relating to the Pennsylvania Assessment and to form groups based upon changing needs.
Dibels (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills)	To measure phonemic awareness, accuracy fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary.
4 sight	To measure actual progress from test to test and do not claim to predict end-of-year gains used supplemental information for one school district.
OLSAT (Otis-Lennon School Ability Test)	To be used as a tool for identification of gifted students.
Pennsylvania System of School Assessment	To be used to evaluate students' progress.
Study Island	To be used as a supplement educational tool but also should assist in improving test scores – used as additional information in school district for gifted identification

Two school districts referenced administering the assessments for students who might fall through the cracks. “It is time consuming, giving these assessments throughout the year, but it is worth it for the most accurate identification and making sure the needs of all students are met.” One participant reflected on a real-life situation in which two students were getting more acceleration in writing and math based on their data results. One student was grade skipping based on her data and performance goals. Again, this situation can apply to Renzulli’s (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness: “The first purpose of gifted education is to provide young people with maximum opportunities for self-fulfillment through the development and expression of one or a combination of performance areas in which superior potential may be present. The second purpose is to increase society’s supply of persons who will help to solve the problems of contemporary civilization by becoming producers of knowledge and art rather than mere consumers of existing information” (Sternberg & Davidson, 2005, p. 249).

Summary of Research Question 1

Respondents expressed a belief that a shift in mindset does occur among all stakeholders in the education of gifted students. Specifically, the expectation within MTSS/RtII is that teachers, specialists, and parents embrace the concept that gifted students, despite their academic prowess, do have learning needs. This growth mindset, borne of the implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework, assumes that gifted curriculum, as well as the instructional practices of those who teach gifted students, should provide opportunities for gifted learners to advance beyond their current level – even if that level is beyond the ceiling inherent in standard curriculums. This is not to say that the needs of other students will be minimized; rather it puts in the minds of teachers and administrators that, despite their high performance in classroom tasks, talented students benefit from interventions that challenge them to perform to higher levels.

A shift in mindset also impacts curriculum/instruction as stakeholders accept responsibility for the education of all students including gifted students; with this mindset, teachers are prepared to examine/modify/enrich curriculum as needed for advanced students. The power to provide interventions quickly and with accuracy was noted by participants as an instructional benefit for all students. This, they said, ensures that students are more likely to be in a state of actively learning at all times.

The second perception, among this study's participants, of MTSS/RtII as a tool for gifted education was that the practice of labeling gifted students after identification is self-limiting both to them and to students who do not "earn" a gifted label. They postulate that eliminating labels provides access to appropriate evaluation and intervention for a greater number of students. It should be noted that the small percentage of gifted students in each district, identified by labels, may be a result of the implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework; in these schools, it is possible that support is provided to a significantly greater number of students than are represented in Table 4 as being officially "gifted."

All participants discussed the use of universal screeners as an effective way to support all learners. This is a safety net so students do not fall through the cracks. Two school districts mentioned creating their own matrices with the incorporation of other important data to make the best-informed choices for the students. By eliminating the need to wait for a formal gifted evaluation, teachers can provide appropriate and timely individualized adaptations through constant data analysis. This growth mindset from mindsets of previous years means that administrators and educators are using the tiered intervention model to help all students. Schools are providing interventions with or without labels. Cluster grouping was also mentioned. This is a method of using data to help students get the instruction they need. Even as all participants did

mention that they conduct formal evaluations as needed, they suggested that MTSS/RtII has led to the implementation of a change in collaboration and leadership to make those decisions. The following section details these practices.

Another way in which a growth mindset/teacher buy-in impacts curriculum and instruction is that the needs of all students, even gifted students whose needs for differentiation had been solely the responsibility of a specialist, or pull-out teacher. Study participants state that teachers collaborate to determine the adjustments that will best provide challenges and support to gifted learners as individuals. Participants alluded to the Educator Effectiveness Model and Pennsylvania's Value-Added Assessment System and its emphasis on student achievement. They stress that part of teacher evaluations are measured on how well their students perform on the state assessment tests. All students ought to show at least one year's academic growth in order to be viewed as progressing appropriately. Because this expectation includes the high achievers, all teachers are motivated to work together so all students make or exceed that goal. It is shared ownership for student success.

Leadership is equally impacted by changes in mindset. Respondents stated that administrators must modify their thinking about educating gifted students within the MTSS/RtII Framework so they can be positive role models; they must be willing to share leadership as members of collaborative teams; doing so fosters buy-in, and a shared responsibility for student outcomes. With Renzulli's (1977, 1978) theories and systems thinking, schools need to look at gifted education differently and meet the needs of students as individuals.

Information proffered by study participants about the concepts of mindset, as well as the practice of using labels to identify giftedness and the use of universal screeners, effectively answered Research Question 1 which asked about their views of the use of MTSS/RtII with

gifted students. Their responses also reflected current research and that curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments, and collaboration/leadership are emerging themes in the use of MTSS/RtII or similar interventions.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, "What are the perceptions of the Pennsylvania's elementary administrators in regards to the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted student data analysis and alignment of instruction?" The components of data analysis and instructional alignment are integral to the MTSS/RtII as a vehicle for first, identifying student needs and second, using data to target instruction to students in a deliberate manner. Garnering information about participants' perceptions of the impact of MTSS/RtII Framework on data analysis and instructional alignment, therefore, was important to this study; it was accomplished by designing interview questions that lead to a discussion of the perceptions of Research Question 2.

Overall, respondents were in agreement that, while both data analysis and instructional alignment have been a regular part of public education for several decades, their implementation was somewhat fractured in terms of consistent and regular implementation. They aver that the structure provided by the MTSS/RtII Framework has in itself improved education for all students. Following is a detailed discussion of administrators' perceptions of data analysis and alignment of instruction within the context of MTSS/RtII. "Our data didn't show that we had a whole lot of high kids but our teachers begged and pleaded and said they would do guided math and they do." Teachers noticed a difference and wanted to implement it for all students. This is another example of the teacher growth mindset that was mentioned regarding Research Question 1.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is perceived by administrators as being key to providing appropriate instruction to all learners. Under the concept of data analysis, cluster grouping was mentioned by representatives of three school districts. Cluster grouping is another example of systems thinking. According to Meadows (2008), a system must consist of three things: elements (students), interconnections (data analysis), and a function or purpose (grouping based on ability for student success). In School District 2, students are clustered based on their data, progress, and needs. Groups are fluid in that students can join/leave different groups as needed. For Language Arts, the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is also utilized to determine the individual's instructional level in reading. Participant 3 mentioned that guided math is an intervention group for grades 1-5. Data analysis is the foundation of cluster grouping or intervention grouping. Participants use benchmarks and mark off cut scores based on gifted students' needs. Participants 2 and 3 mentioned that they noticed a need for teachers to learn how to effectively analyze data and benchmarks. As a school leader, one participant organized professional development for teachers in the areas of analyzing data and implementing teaching methods based on differentiated instruction. Within a systems thinking model, this is a leadership mindset: "What's appropriate when you're learning is small steps, constant monitoring, and a willingness to change course as you find out more about where it's leading" (Meadows, 2008, p. 180).

Administrators have to monitor this process of analyzing and using data to be sure it is managed with validity and reliability. After analyzing data, if there is a need for more intensive instruction, students can move to Tier III which might entail pull out or grade skipping for that particular subject or need. Instead of delaying instructional adjustments until students fail, or allowing students to meet ceiling benchmarks without further challenges, the MTSS/RtII

Framework provides opportunities for students to get what they need immediately. This reflects the basis of Renzulli's theories, The Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness (1978) and The Enrichment Triad Model (1977), which declare that students need to be challenged based on their needs and interests so they can be effective problem solvers and successful citizens in society. Participant 6 stated that "we save so much time meeting the students' needs through different tiers and interventions that we don't have to wait the duration for an evaluation to happen." Another perception about the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students is that students are being pulled to work in small intervention groups even if they are not identified. One participant pointed out, however, that such a practice could also have potential deleterious consequences: because more students are being pulled, there could be a resultant need among some gifted students for increased support in Tier III in order to "raise the bar" sufficiently. Another participant pointed out that data analysis is used differently for gifted students. Because the school is looking for mastery of concepts (with every student) and gifted students have already mastered some of those concepts, this school has a caseload manager who checks in on teachers every week to confirm that the advanced needs of the gifted students are being satisfied beyond the confines of the curriculum.

All participants noted the important contribution of teacher leaders such as caseload managers, gifted coaches, gifted teachers, instructional specialists, and academic specialists who assist with monitoring students' progress and students' standards based learning. These people also co-taught and model in Tier I and, based on students' needs and levels of mastery, assist with intervention groups that might be needed for Tier II and Tier III. All administrators identified these teacher leaders as being an integral part of the MTSS/RtII system. "Key to the effectiveness of the process (system) is using it to inform principals and improve their (teachers')

professional practice rather than ranking or rating them" (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, p. 39). Sometimes, change-based information (i.e., data garnered through the MTSS/RtII Framework) is accepted more readily when issued by peers rather than administrators. "So, we start with placement; and then teacher training is quite good with induction to new teachers all the way through the professional development [regarding analyzing data effectively]. But I think the heart of our model is the academic specialist. There is one in each elementary school. They respond to teachers' concerns and needs and lend an extra hand," stated one participant. In addition to teacher leaders, there were Elementary Student Assistance Program team meetings, intervention meetings, and data meetings, mentioned by all of the participants, whose members gather and discuss data and align it to gifted students' instruction in the specific tiers.

Alignment of Instruction

The second piece of this research question, What are the perceptions in regards to the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework and alignment of instruction?, asked participant to share their views of alignment of instruction, a practice that has been fine-tuned through the MTSS/RtII process. Participant 5 stated "The rigor of the instruction in the classrooms is interfaced with Pennsylvania Core Standards. What used to be reserved for the gifted students is now expected treatment for all students. There are reading levels, complex texts, and higher order thinking skills for all students. Looking at the rigor and depth of knowledge that are expected for every student, we realized that they align better with what we had in the past reserved for students who accelerate." According to participants, all curriculums that have been implemented were aligned with the Pennsylvania Core Standards. With these curriculum-based assessments, schools can also find outliers who will benefit from intervention; it is a "filtering system for all," said Participant 5.

One school has implemented a personalized hybrid model for 4th grade students. Participant 4 explained,

> It looks a little different through the direct instruction module in the rotation station module during that language arts block. In most grade levels, it is 120 minutes a day which incorporates writing and 90 minutes a day for reading. The hybrid model is direct instruction and it is part of the hour reading block – 20 minutes' direct instruction and 20 minutes independent. This is usually three times a week for digital content online which can be accelerated or for remediation depending on what the child needs and 20 minutes of a collaborative group that rotates. Sometimes, it is heterogeneous or homogenous depending what is being worked on and that is a different thing in 4th grade. I think we are moving next year to grades 3-5. The diagnostic prescriptive resource, i-Ready is the digital content used for all students including the gifted students. [The i-Ready resource is used because] the gifted students can reach their fullest potentials; not restricted by ceiling benchmarks, with Math stations and in the English Language Arts hybrid station rotation.

Another participant mentioned that the district had already been using the MTSS/RtII Framework with struggling students so they just "inverted the triangle and took it sideways" for advanced learners. This concept was also shared by Tamara Fisher (2009) in Chapter Two where she proposed breaking the three Tiers into five Tiers to include the advanced and gifted learners. The biggest challenge with that idea was the process of cluster grouping. Using data, teachers and the gifted support teacher work collaboratively and share ownership of the gifted students. They differentiate in Tier I and Tier II. They compact instruction in Tier II and Tier III. To accomplish this, professional development about the implementation of cluster grouping was

provided; additionally, a state gifted liaison provided professional development regarding compacting and data analysis. Participant 6 stated, “We reviewed the regular curriculum as the workhorse of curriculum in that we needed to exhaust all enriching opportunities in the regular curriculum before going into the next step which would be acceleration.”

From that core curriculum instruction, data are measured and analyzed. Teachers are realizing the importance of accountability. The practice of administering various assessments, for the sake of saying that they were given, was sidelined; participants instead reported that the primary tools of data analysis and alignment of instruction are imperative with the Pennsylvania Core Standards and in meeting the needs of all students including the gifted students. According to Renzulli (1977), “the gifted education movement has fondly embraced the simulation and learning games approach to instruction because the open-ended nature of many activities provides opportunities for “on-your-feet thinking” rather than the mere regurgitation of facts, principles, or other predetermined conclusions” (p.27).

The MTSS/RtII Framework has helped to ameliorate the idea that pull-out was a necessary part of gifted education. That being stated, some participants mentioned that there remains a need to pull learners out for some gifted services but not to the degree to which schools practiced in the past. With a tiered system, students who demonstrate academic need can also move into Tier II to receive more intensive instruction. Co-teaching regularly with the gifted support teacher was mentioned by two participants as a collaborative approach for Tier I and Tier II interventions. Examples are small group or cluster grouping interventions (e.g., literature circles and novel studies) based on students’ advanced needs. This idea of tiered services is also evident in Renzulli’s (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli’s (1977)

Enrichment Triad Model in which students need, based on interest and task, more inquiry-based learning.

To align instruction, three participants use the cluster grouping model. One school district uses the Dan Treffinger model, referenced in Chapter One and cited in Coleman & Harrison, 1997, stating, "…in which levels of service are from enrichment for all students to interesting things for some students to many students – to more individualized for some and some more radical enrichment for few. That whole model drives home the notion these are all our kids and we're about meeting the needs of all of our kids and not sending them out (to different rooms)." Participants 3 and 5 mentioned using Susan Winebrenner's (1992) model as referenced in previous Chapters. Schools use Winebrenner's model (1992). by "grouping them by number and we use the data to cluster students." Participant 2 also said this about the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students: "We're trying to meet the needs of gifted students at least a couple times a cycle if not daily, through small group intervention and also (through) work within the classroom. So, I think that's a big difference than the old stand-alone gifted program that we had in the past." With the multi-tiered system of supports, all students are provided with a core curriculum that includes standards aligned instruction.

Returning briefly to Research Question 1, by which participants agreed that MTSS/RtII had value, they believe that MTSS/RtII has made it possible for Pennsylvania's core curriculum, more rigorous than previous curriculums, to support the varying needs of more students. Of particular benefit is the open-ended nature of intervention; aptly applied, data analysis and alignment of instruction allow even gifted students to receive Tier II or Tier III services. Participant #2 stated, "Teachers have more materials, and they're able to meet students within

the classroom as compared to previously, when they might just have met them once a week or so, you know, as a pull-out program."

The benefit of proper data analysis, discussed above, is negated if carried out in the absence of an equally conscientious attention to accurate alignment of instruction with curriculum. For this to occur, there is a need for extensive progress monitoring; this action ensures the forward progress of every student's learning. Participant 2 explained that the needs of students are being met in the regular classroom with pull-out support or "What I Need," or WIN, an instructional and behavioral curriculum that is aligned to both core standards and students' needs. With this model, students do not need Gifted Individualized Educational Plans (GIEPs) to receive enrichment. This practice correlates with Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model which suggests that students' needs should be met based on individual interests. Within the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness, Renzulli defines two kinds of giftedness: schoolhouse giftedness and creative-productive giftedness. Schoolhouse giftedness is defined as test-taking or lesson-learning giftedness where by students' abilities are made visible via an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test. In the case of creative-productive giftedness, more than an IQ score needs to be evaluated. Data from different sources are imperative to meet the needs of these creative individuals. Participant 6 responded, "We are very frustrated that we can't use the state's test in an out-of-level fashion because we feel, with a lot of bright kids, the feedback that you get is quite minimal compared to what we use ourselves. But I think the idea, that we measure our kids as extensively as we do for their instructional level and then respond to it, has changed the rigor for individual kids in all classes."

The topic of instructional alignment was interlaced with reference to differentiated instruction, as a research-based instruction. As an example, Participant 1 mentioned that time for professional development is allotted every Friday afternoon to provide support and opportunity for collaboration; an area of particular interest to staff is the application of differentiated instruction in teachers' classrooms.

With alignment of instruction, the question of continuing the process throughout other schools within districts came to bear. Two school districts mentioned concern among parents about the transition from elementary schools to the middle schools. "Is there a Framework? Is the system the same?" asked some parents. According to Meadows (2009), "systems with similar feedback structures produce similar dynamic behaviors" (p. 50). Because the MTSS/RtII Framework, based on evidence, is showing positive results, the administrators in these districts are working to extend the MTSS/RtII Framework through the collaboration and leadership in the middle schools and other elementary schools.

Summary of Research Question 2

Pennsylvania Core Standards have transformed teaching strategies to be data driven and instructionally aligned. Participants in the study agreed that the implementation of Pennsylvania's Core Standards and Value-Added Assessment System transformed the way in which teaching is carried out in the classrooms as well as the ways in which gifted students' needs are being met. "One, the rigor of our curriculum especially in Language Arts and Math has greatly increased and we are not seeing a need to do as much pull out," Participant 4 said. All participants were in agreement that the MTSS/RtII Framework, which supports Core Standards, simplifies the process of developing and modifying curriculum and instruction to address the needs of gifted students; they expressed particular appreciation for the heightened sense of

responsibility among all stakeholders to provide appropriate instruction to all learners brought on by use of MTSS/RtII. This exploration into ways to deliver appropriately challenging instruction within curriculum is reflected by Participant 2 who stated as an example, “I think now, through the use of technology, they’re doing a lot more with the gifted students. Their projects are no longer just book reports or reporting out. It’s okay using multimedia with projects.” Regarding standards, Participant 2 said, “Luckily with Common Core, the standards are academically higher, so we’ve upgraded resources and materials. They now meet those Pennsylvania Core goals.”

Administrators postulated that, prior to deliberately implementing the MTSS/RtII Framework, data analysis and alignment practices had been applied in haphazard fashion. Accountability was also mentioned as a benefit of this data analysis and alignment of instruction piece. All teachers are accountable for all students’ learning, a concept embraced through the growth mindset and the Educator Effectiveness Model discussed earlier. According to participants, the inclusion of thorough data analysis and careful alignment of instruction with standards as well as with student needs (as defined through data analysis) within the MTSS/RtII Framework provides gifted students with optimum learning opportunities. They pointed to the Framework as being the impetus behind using data in thoughtful and ongoing ways to direct instruction specific to the needs of all students as they grow academically.

Of note is the almost natural infusion of Lunenberg’s (2011) considerations of “promoting inquiry and dialogue” and “encouraging collaboration and team learning” into districts’ current practice as they implement the MTSS/RtII Framework. As an example, one school district met the criteria for a particular grant, thus affording them the opportunity to provide more professional development; based on needs identified through a collaborative effort,

training focused on enhancing expertise in using data to inform instruction. Administrators have expanded their leadership to include the empowerment of others. They see value in knowing not only their students' needs but the teachers' needs as well. Providing teacher training (i.e., technology training and support for differentiation instruction) helps teachers buy in to the concept (Prager, 2015) of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. While Research Question 2 provided specific insight into participants' views of the relationship between data analysis and alignment of instruction and the MTSS/RtII Framework, responses to the final question will cover the perceived value of the three themes surfaced in this study and supported by research: curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments, and collaboration/leadership.

Research Question 3

In response to Research Question 3, "What underlying themes emerge from interviews with Pennsylvania elementary administrators about the use of MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students?", three themes did surface. The interdependent themes of curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessment, and collaboration/leadership were woven throughout the interviews. The following sections will further discuss the relationship between each theme, and the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted elementary students.

Curriculum and Instruction

The MTSS/RtII Framework is a tool with which administrators and instructional staff can more effectively support academic growth among all learners. As the focus of this study was specific to use of the Framework with gifted students, participants included repeated reference to "systems thinking," "buy-in," and "mindset". They stated that implementation of MTSS/RtII revealed to stakeholders that common practices in gifted education were less than effective. This

change in mindset was a necessary first step in examining curriculum and instruction, and in implementing adaptations as needed by all students and by gifted students in particular. One administrator mentioned that,

> they do not call it the RTI Framework. About twenty years ago, I was brought into the district as a change agent for gifted education and I have been working on developing a multi-tiered system of supports that included looking at gifted reform, upping the rigor of curriculum, training teachers on strategies on differentiated instruction and expectation for high-end learners. We made sure we didn't go the path of heterogeneously grouping strategies as many school districts were doing especially at the middle school level. We believe that grouping students makes instruction efficient but we are very careful not to pigeon hole them into permanent groups… We have grown more sophisticated throughout the years but philosophically, at the very beginning our goal was to analyze what each child needed and program accordingly.

The remarks of participants show that schools are likely to have been implementing many of the components of MTSS/RtII even before the framework had been implemented. Based on Renzulli's (1977, 1978) theories and systems thinking approach, the MTSS/RtII Framework is an interconnected and flexible system that includes meeting the interests of the gifted students, as well as addressing their creativity and special interests based on an interrelated system. "Response to Intervention is, simply put, a process of implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring student progress, and adjusting instruction based on the students' responses" (Bender & Shores, 2007, p.7). Participant 7 stated,

…and to understand that our primary job is to keep an eye out for those high-end learners – we are aggressively programming the higher end students and the recognized need as much as the kid that has fewer talents – it is not one thing – the situation and the fact that academic specialists are in every building-and that is their job- they are integrated – it has an organic feel to it – it would take some time if you were in the building to get a sense of it and to identify who they are (academic specialists) because they are in classrooms, with teachers, modeling, working on materials. There really isn't that separation so it is often and quickly that we can make this happen through collaboration and meeting the needs of the higher end students. We just make it happen – our ability to be very nimble and our whole framework to be – we can do very cool compacting, acceleration but we are open to that – you are not in or out. So, organic it is very hard to describe.

This relates to Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model which consists of three types of Enrichment as shown in Figure 5.

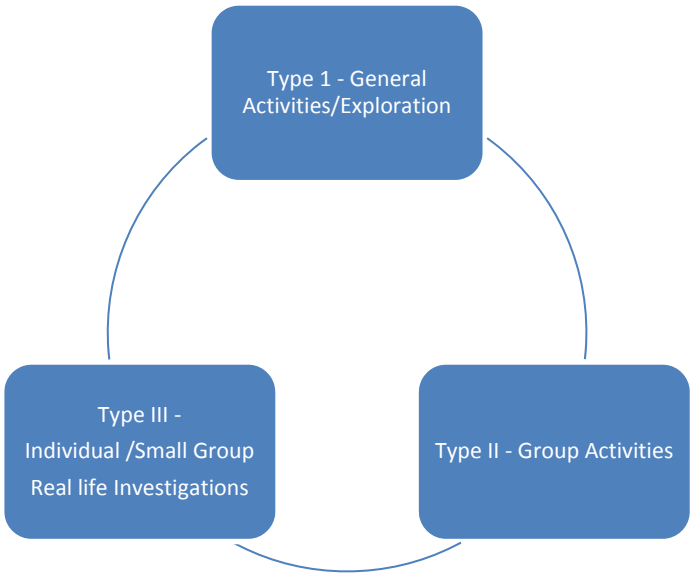

Figure 5. Renzulli's The Enrichment Triad model. Adapted from The Enrichment Triad Model by J. Renzulli, 1977. Copyright 1977 by Creative Learning Press.

Type I Enrichment consists of experiences that interest the student and helps teachers make decisions about the kinds of Type II enrichment activities that should be selected. This correlates with Tier I regarding differentiated instruction and progress monitoring. The gifted students' needs are met within the regular classroom. If warranted, gifted students' needs can be met in Type II with enrichment and acceleration, small group activities, and with Type III enrichment, with more individualized solutions, like grade skipping and curriculum compacting.

The processes named above correlate directly with Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework. Tier 1 instruction involves standards aligned instruction and school-wide foundational instruction. Instruction is of high quality using a standards-aligned core curriculum for all students. All students receive an integrated system of aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It promotes school completion or success measured by other periodic progress monitoring benchmark assessments" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008, p.10). Within this core curriculum, students are assessed to determine whether or not they need Tier II intervention. This is accomplished through data analysis and assessments.

Data Analysis /Assessments

As mentioned throughout the discussion of the themes exposed by this study, these themes are interrelated. For example, curriculum and instruction can be viewed as the first of a three-pronged initiative. The rationale is that, as teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together toward excellence in teaching and learning, there exists an ancillary need to ensure that stakeholders are learning and teaching in ways that meet the specific needs of all learners. Hence the second theme revealed through the interviews, the use of data analysis and assessments, forms the second prong of the MTSS/RtII initiative. It is this component that

identifies students' performances, needs and progress, thus informing the instructional team of its "next steps" in meeting student needs.

There is a correlation between Type II Enrichment and Tier II of the MTSS/RtII Framework. With Type II Enrichment, small group training activities can take place. According to Tier II of the MTSS/RtII Framework, students would receive Tier I instruction and enrichment and would therefore receive more academic support for going beyond the benchmarks. Strategic interventions are standards aligned instructional, supplemental, small group interventions which may include specialized materials. These interventions are research based and should meet students' specific needs through flexible grouping for core content areas like reading and mathematics (Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008; Johnsen et al, 2012; Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008). In Tier III, students would receive intensive enrichment interventions like grade skipping, curriculum compacting, and novel studies (Fisher, 2009). According to Type II Enrichment, this would involve individual and small group investigations of real problems (Renzulli, 1977). Participant 1 replied, "I think it has enabled teachers to look at their different tiers of differentiating." Based on student enrollment and needs, students in one building may not get the same services as do students in another building in the same district. So, a student in one school may be receiving Tier III services but, if that student would transfer, he might be only receiving Tier II services based on the receiving school's cluster grouping. As an aside, this problem actually manifested itself between two school districts. School District 2 demonstrated issues between schools based on different beliefs of what gifted students should receive. Participant 3 reflected, "We're checking up on gifted students all the time. We probably didn't as much before, so they're in our brains.

We really need to intervene with gifted students as well." Gifted students should have an equal opportunity to receive the best education based on their own needs.

Based on interviews, even though current thought is that high-achieving students' needs are to be met in the regular classrooms, school districts still conduct the special education evaluations to ensure that they follow the Pennsylvania Department of Education's protocol. Among all schools, protocols are annually reviewed. There is an alignment in curriculum with standards for enrichment. One school district referred to a concern about teachers buying into curriculum compacting. A participant noted, "We looked at all of the components of the MTSS Framework: shared ownership, universal screening, progress monitoring, professional development, and just said we have to do all of this and look at the population as well. Our goal is what we continue to say: we would never deny a struggling learner access to a treatment to a tiered intervention if they didn't have an IEP. We would never reserve an enrichment or accelerated student if they had data evidence to need just because they didn't have a Gifted Individualized Educational Plan." Two school districts observed that the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment scores can not be used effectively for gifted students since these learners usually score proficient or advanced on these assessments. One school district meets the needs of its gifted students through the MTSS/RtII Framework by starting with cluster grouping. In cluster grouping, one interviewee noted, "We work hard to get it right and that is Tier I. It is number one in my opinion. Getting them into groups where (they're) more likely to have their needs met because they are similar as opposed to using the sprinkle theory – where you take all of your best kids and sprinkle them fairly across grade levels."

If data analysis is done accurately with students and Tier I core instruction is planned accordingly and with teacher collaboration, the MTSS/RtII Framework could lessen the need for

students to be identified as gifted. Participant 6 explains, “I can’t state strongly enough as the state defines that specialized designed instruction is stuff that other kids normally don’t have access to. You almost have to set up an ancillary relationship where parents feel that they have to have a legally protective document in order to provide what we know their child needs because we measure them against the curriculum. So, to me the intervention model by reserving nothing first upon formal identification, we are able to meet the needs of all of our students far more comprehensively and far more efficiently than the state has assumed as necessary in meeting the needs of high-end kids.”

Collaboration and Leadership

The third theme of common elements that emerged in Research Question 3 was associated with collaboration and leadership. This is a logical conclusion to the three-pronged initiative imbedded in the MTSS/RtII Framework as identified by participants of this study: the operative elements of the framework, according to respondents, were curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments and finally, collaboration/leadership. Studying these elements sequentially, a visible connection between the themes can be discerned. First, as mentioned above, with curriculum and instruction among participants in terms of assuming joint responsibility for all students. Coupling this with an ancillary acceptance of all students as being equally deserving of the most optimum opportunities based on their own abilities whether labeled as “gifted” or not, leads naturally to the need for effective data analysis and assessments in order to support the newly enhanced determination of stakeholders to address the needs of all learners. The theme of collaboration and leadership cements the ability of participants to follow through on the gains made with advances in curriculum and instruction, and data analysis and assessments.

During interviews, the concept of teacher buy-in surfaced when talking about collaboration and leadership. Teacher buy-in is not a new concept; it is described as "self-fulfilling prophecy" in a 1964 California study, where teachers were told that they had the best students based from a manipulated test called "Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition". This was administered in eighteen classrooms and teachers were led to believe that 20 percent of their incoming students were to bloom in high academic achievement within the school year. Rosters were randomly assigned and the only difference between the bloomers and the rest of their class was the mind-set the teachers developed (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1963). The results demonstrate the power of a self-fulfilling prophecy by which students who were led to believe that they were on the verge of great academic success performed accordingly; the opposite held true for students who were not labeled this way. A number of studies have shown that teacher expectations, another way to describe "buy-in", can have a tremendous effect on students' academic performance (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1963). It is this buy-in, or growth mindset within and through the MTSS/RtII Framework that assumes from the start that all students are capable of achieving beyond their current performance levels. Teacher buy-in was also mentioned in the study conducted by Necciai (2013) in regards to Research Question 2 and through administrator interviews.

One participant mentioned, "…high quality instruction has raised the rigor for all of our students. I think we found we can meet the needs of most of our students in the regular classrooms with cooperative planning for the parents, regular teacher and the gifted support teacher and the push-in time to work with those students. We have to do it for all. The gifted students are such good models of thinking that when we were taking them out (of class for individualized instruction), we took away our best models for the other students."

Representatives of two school districts alluded to the fact that, because it was best for students, they had already been practicing some of these components before the MTSS/RtII Framework like collaboration. Two types of collaboration became evident during interviews: teacher collaboration and parent collaboration.

Teacher Collaboration. Collaboration between teachers who share responsibility for all learners was mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews. As an example, Participant 5 described changes to the duties of teachers of gifted students from being the sole deliverer of enrichment opportunities often unrelated to the curriculum. Teachers of gifted learners promoted/modeled the practice of defining, through shared examination of student data and identified needs, instructional strategies. “This teacher did the selling but ultimately the model sold itself,” mentioned Participant 5.

In one school district, the school counselor, school psychologist, and administrator meet weekly for the purpose of discussing and brainstorming resolutions to student issues as they arise. They also use this time to formally review behavior data (e.g., behavioral plans and Functional Based Assessments (FBA) which could be used as a part of the problem solving process. A survey was distributed among all teachers by the counselor in order to get more complete information about the school’s students. Again, this practice falls into the realm of Renzulli’s (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness in which students should have three characteristics: above average ability in something, creativity, and task commitment. If students are demonstrating some of these abilities but not others, a survey about students’ behaviors could be beneficial. Examination of the functional behavior assessments (FBA) go beyond the behavior itself and looks at social, affective, cognitive and/or environmental factors associated with the behavior.

In another example, a music teacher shared a book about mindsets with a participant in this study. The respondent from another school district talked about the book, "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success" written by Dr. Carol Dweck (2006) (this book was discussed under Research Question 1). It was available for use in a book study among teachers.

Parent Collaboration. Teacher collaboration is important to the effectiveness of instructional programs; it is also true that student achievement is enhanced with parent participation in the education of their children. As identified by participants, parent collaboration is an area in need of improvement for most schools. One administrator reported that parents are a great resource in two ways. First they are able to provide insights about their children that are unavailable through testing and regular school processes. Second, parent involvement is representative of the previously referenced accountability among all stakeholders, in this case that of parents, teachers, and students (Lambert, 1998).

Another administrator opined that, while parent workshops inform attendees about the curriculum, there has been little change in parent collaboration about curriculum and instruction since the start of the MTSS/RtII Implementation process. But, parent buy-in regarding implementation and meeting gifted students' needs through a tiered system has been huge. "It took conversations," stated another administrator, "There was some initial resistance from getting pulled and not going to the end of the hall – I hate to use that word but sort of that elitist so we just ask them to trust us and have faith and in this building. We have a new gifted support teacher, that took a lot of selling and she's done an amazing job." Regarding parents, one participant mentioned, "I think that is the real strength that we do through the RTI framework … whenever a parent or we notice there is a need, we immediately call them in for a meeting and we talk about what we see or would address whatever the need is. They accelerate or grade

skip." All participants mentioned that parent collaboration is growing but not mastered. Parents are more involved regarding the GIEP meetings. One administrator mentioned that "we talk to parents at length and what we are seeing and they are seeing… we discovered that we are never able to predict with 100% accuracy that we know the solution to what the student's unique situation might be and the parent is the absolute partner in everything that we do."

Leadership. As stated, collaboration is essential to the successful implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework. It stands to reason that some form of leadership exists to ensure that collaborative groups maintain a collective focus and progress. According to Lambert (1998), "The key notion in this definition is that leadership is about learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively" (p.5).

Administrative Leadership. Study participants referred frequently to the value of leadership and how it related to the MTSS/RtII Framework regarding gifted elementary students. The goal for administrators is to provide the teachers with what they and their students need to be successful. Elements of leadership, as a primary theme of this study, became evident during interviews when administrators mentioned leading through change: running meetings, developing professional development, analyzing data, creating master schedules that enable the framework to be implemented, allowing teachers to have choices in co-teaching, and using a hands-on approach to help teachers meet the needs of their gifted students. This makes it easy and appealing for teachers to buy into the mindset that gifted students' needs can be met through a multi-tiered systems of support. Referring to Dufour and Marzano (2011), with a systems thinking approach, the principal's/ (administrator's) actions have a great impact on teacher actions in the classroom, which then impact student achievement.

In the book “Buy-in”, Kotter and Whitehead stated, “The coalition, still filled with a sense of urgency, finds ways to communicate the vision and strategies to everyone who needs to hear them, in order to obtain broad based buy-in. Communication occurs relentlessly, typically using any channel: meetings, email, paper, one-on-one conversations, posters. When people have truly bought in, intellectually and emotionally, the process continues” (Kotter & Whitehead, 2010, p.183). It takes time and leadership commitment for any school change to occur, the urgency is with the PVAAS scores and changing the mindset so the MTSS/RtII Framework is viewed as “a best for all model” rather than as another short-lived program. Typical of feedback from all respondents, the framework was not an add-on program; it had in fact been incorporated into daily processes. Schools had begun incorporating components of the MTSS/RtII Framework before it had a name. According to one administrator, the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System scores have enhanced teacher buy-in and collaboration. “Because all kids have to grow (academically) a year so when we analyze that data which now is connected to the teacher evaluation then we sell the model so that’s how the school is going and it is not perfect but that is where we are heading.”

Representative of providing strategic leadership for learning, administrators must know their students’ and teachers’ needs. Professional development was mentioned as a means of giving teachers the skills and the mindset they need to be successful and, in turn, to help their students be successful as well. Budget issues have leaders in one school district offering professional development through EduPlanet, a technology software through which teachers can access resources and webinars on different topics. Teachers can also choose to attend sessions through their local Intermediate Unit. Participant 2 stated “We have an in-school district catalog of all different courses teachers can take and there’s a course on gifted.” Another participant

stated that, with the exception of the start and end of the school year, the district's calendar does not include Professional Days during the school year; online and Intermediate Unit opportunities are ideal venues for effective training events that eliminate the needs to dedicate school days for staff development.

The above scenario is in contrast to School District 2 which allots every Friday afternoon to Professional Development/ Collaboration time. Participant 2 wants to provide teachers with whatever resources they need. One administrator mentioned building collaboration with other teachers. When interviewing one administrator about professional development, she mentioned a desire to revisit what gifted looks like to teachers. Her contention was that some gifted students could be underachievers and unmotivated students.

Teacher Leadership. As stated, administrators agreed that, within the MTSS/RtII Framework, their role as leader entails first understanding the needs of teachers and then providing the tools to satisfy those needs. They further described the positive effects of teacher leadership within collaborative teams of teachers, parents, specialists, and support staff. This leadership manifests itself in two ways. First, administrators empower teachers by providing opportunities to create their own learning opportunities. In this way, professional development is teacher driven and teacher based; in many instances teachers assume a leadership role by sharing their particular expertise with their peers. As an example, Participant 2 reported that middle and high school gifted teachers can present a gifted seminar to the elementary teachers who are not identified as gifted teachers, but just want to learn more about differentiated instruction and progress monitoring for the high achievers.

A second form of teacher leadership, as mentioned by Participant 6, emerges directly from teachers, who as leaders, train the other instructional staff, "[As a school leader], teaching

teachers how to deal with high-end learners all day is crucial. I don't know if you could implement an intervention based system without regular education teachers being trained in how to do that," she continued, "the induction team consisting of guidance counselors and academic specialists not only train teachers at a training but they meet during planning periods or model lessons within the regular classrooms." In order for this to happen, administrators have to reorganize mindsets and schedules so everything fits like a puzzle.

Summary of Research Question 3

When examining transcripts for themes regarding the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students, discussion with the participants revealed that collaboration and leadership were perceived as crucial to the development and implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. In this model, the concept of collaboration expands to include more than school personnel; parents are integral to the team of decision makers. In their discussion of leadership, administrators pointed to the obvious form of leadership, wherein administrators provide support to members of their schools' collaborative teams. In addition to this universal definition of leadership, participants expounded on the value of promoting peer leadership, the practice of empowering teachers, specialists and even parents to lead groups whenever doing so will aid in achieving the goals of the group. Instilling a leadership mindset among members of a collaborative team empowers them to assist teachers on a regular basis to meet the needs of their gifted students, or educating parents whose children's needs are going to be met.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four described the results of this study regarding administrator perceptions of the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. Findings were derived from

input, gathered during open-ended interviews with a number of administrators in school districts across Pennsylvania. The researcher designed interview topics that would guide the discussion to answer these questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the Pennsylvania's elementary administrators on the use of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) / Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) Framework with gifted systems?

2. What are the perceptions of the Pennsylvania's elementary administrators in regards to the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted student data analysis and alignment of instruction?

3. What underlying themes emerge from interviews with Pennsylvania elementary administrators about the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students?

Even as participants shared unique perceptions of their experiences, many similarities were also identified. These commonalities can provide insight to other administrators striving for success with all students, including gifted elementary students. The findings suggest that the perception of all the participants is positive regarding the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted elementary students. Results also correlate with Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model as mentioned in this study.

After analysis and categorizations, several common themes emerged as being integral to MTSS/RtII implementation; these are curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments, and collaboration/leadership. Following is a capsulation of the categories and their relationship to the MTSS/RtII Framework.

Table 8

Alignment of Themes and the MTSS/RtII Framework

Theme	**Influence on the MTSS/RtII Framework Process on Gifted Education**
Curriculum	Alignment of curriculum to state standards, ensures that teachers are providing learning opportunities for gifted learners in a focused and deliberate manner, that leads to expected outcomes at increasing levels of proficiency.
Instruction	Use of universal screening tools to support every student, including students who demonstrate above average ability in some areas, creativity, and task commitment, supports growth among identified and non-identified learners. Reduction in the need for labels allows teachers to identify needs and provide appropriate instruction/adaptations to every student. Growth mindset among all stakeholders (teachers, administrators, specialists, parents, students) enhances success for gifted students in the classroom and through tiered instruction.
Data Analysis	Ongoing evaluation of each student's current performance/behavioral levels gives the team the information needed adjust/provide appropriate instruction and challenges as the gifted learner progresses.
Assessments	Use of progress monitoring helps teachers to provide instruction that meets the changing needs of academically advanced learners.
Collaboration	Availability of input and shared responsibility meets the needs of all students including gifted students, first within the regular classroom and then, as needed, with supports such as flexible grouping, grade skipping, etc.
Leadership	Insight into the tools teachers need supports advanced learning for all students. Empowerment of stakeholders to take leadership roles within their teams.

With the implementation of MTSS/RtII, the needs of high achieving students are being met through a tiered system that involves continuous curriculum monitoring, data analysis, assessing, and ongoing teacher and parent collaboration. Students that might otherwise "fall through the cracks" are identified and supported through this system. While the need for more time and consistency were noted as challenges, participants were, overall, very satisfied with the work they have done to assist in the development of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students; they were able to provide evidence to verify the success of the framework. One example is the reduced number of gifted students presented in Table 4, indicative of a reduction in the use of labels to identify which students do or do not receive adaptive instruction. The reason for low percentages in this area, in the view of the researcher, is that schools administrators, teachers, and parents are recognizing the MTSS/RtII Framework as a system to meet the needs of gifted elementary students and that stakeholders are less concerned about labeling students as gifted.

Some findings of this study suggest that

- The MTSS/RtII Framework offers to districts something of a formula to follow that helps them stay "on task" when it comes to correlating teaching to state standards.
- Labels are a limiter in terms of which students are worthy of advanced instruction; at the same time, labels erroneously identify students as being on "auto pilot" and in need of little support.
- All students benefit from the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework and tiered interventions based on individual interests and needs.

Chapter Five will present a thorough discussion of this study's findings as they relate to implications for future practice.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The MTSS/RtII Framework in Pennsylvania is derived from the progression of the Response to Intervention (RTI) Model to the Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII) Model to the Mulit-Tiered Systems of Support/Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework (MTSS/RtII). In its original form RtI, had been used as an alternative to the discrepancy model for special education decision making since the 1960s; during that time, emphasis had been on identifying and supporting students' deficient academic needs. A significant change with the RTI Framework (2005) included additional attention paid to its instructional component. With subsequent modifications, RtI was renamed the Response to Instruction and Intervention Model in 2009 and, most currently, has morphed into the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support; this framework includes the Pennsylvania Core Standards, the Pennsylvania's Educator Effectiveness Model, and Pennsylvania's Value-Added Assessment System (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a.; Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b.).

Because of the current changes to the Pennsylvania's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, it was advantageous to investigate perceptions of administrators regarding the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. A qualitative approach was implemented to analyze administrator perceptions about this framework and make connections to Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model with the systems thinking approach. "This chapter begins with a summary of the results, the implications and will be followed by the conclusions. Finally, recommendations for future research are provided" (Prager, 2015, p.107).

Administrators' perceptions regarding the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students were investigated. Gaining knowledge about the attitudes of this group toward the components of the MTSS/RtII Framework, whose support is critical to systemic implementation with gifted populations, was worthy of study because it can lead to a more systemic approach to meet the needs of the gifted students. This study may contribute to an early identification of high achieving students and to meeting their needs more effectively by developing a school-wide evaluative/instructional system.

Summary of Findings

The findings will provide relevant information that is needed for current research on gifted education (Dai & Chen, 2014, Davis, 2006, Friedman, 2005, Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). Since the MTSS/RtII Framework in Pennsylvania is newer, this study focused on the development of this framework with gifted elementary students and provides suggestions on how it could impact future research. Findings are similar to what is known about this topic within the surfacing themes of curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments, and collaboration/leadership; results also support the literature regarding Response to Intervention (Bender & Shores, 2007, Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005, Boswell & Carlile, 2010, Coleman & Johnsen, 2011, 2013, Johnsen, Sulak & Rollins, 2012).

During interviews, participants shared their perceptions in connections with gifted education within the MTSS/RtII Framework. Participants gave detailed answers to interview questions, which provided a comprehensive description of their use of the multi-tiered system and how the system related to their leadership and teacher practices which lead to student success. The following section examines results found regarding administrator's perceptions of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students based on the Research Questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question focused on the perceptions of Pennsylvania's elementary administrators on the use of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) /Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) Framework with gifted students. Recently, all participants have implemented or have started to implement the components of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. The influence of Pennsylvania Core Standards and the Pennsylvania's Educator Effectiveness Model was evident among some participants. They described the rigor of the regular curriculum based on the Pennsylvania Core Standards and the resultant challenge of providing the means by which all students can achieve to these higher standards. Participants also provided insight about the framework being beneficial for all students and not just the gifted students. With the rigor of the curriculum and teaching methods, most students' needs are met in Tier I instruction.

Not only meeting high expectations bound by the state was evident in interviews, but the term mindset was also verbalized. According to Figure 4 in Chapter Four, a growth mindset produces positive change. Administrators pointed out that when the teachers demonstrated a growth mindset, teacher-buy in occurred and gifted student achievement increased. With a growth mindset, administrators, teachers, parents, and students aspire to work together for gifted student success through multi-tiered systems of support.

Administrators discussed the need to understand the term "giftedness" and, when implementing a multi-tiered system of supports for gifted elementary students, to consider meeting individual students' needs through different measures and by different characteristics: ability, task commitment, and creativity. The combination of Renzulli's (1977, 1978) theories, put into practice, makes an effective system that can be measured and adapted for the needs of

high-end thinkers. The participants responded similarly and offered evidence that it was an effective system; participants implied that they were going to continue to implement and further develop the MTSS/RtII components with gifted students.

Not only were concepts of systems thinking present during conversations with the participants but also the factors of labeling gifted suggested by Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness were also evident. Labeling giftedness is defined as being more than an IQ score; the whole child should be looked at extensively based on interests and current, ongoing data. If students need greater challenge, which can not be supplied through the core curriculum alone, they should have opportunities to access Tier II and/or, Tier III interventions. This system has to be monitored and data need to be analyzed constantly to make sure these high achievers' needs are met and that they are not limited by ceiling based assessments. The points within Renzulli's (1977 & 1978) theories should be considered as the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students is implemented and administrators develop the framework in their schools.

Respondents agreed that the framework of the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support inherent in MTSS/RtII, while challenging, provides stakeholders with tools that direct interventions and support their efforts. If students need more intensive instruction, they will receive Tier II or even Tier III instruction without having to wait for a formalized gifted evaluation. Universal screeners were utilized on a regular basis so students do not fall through the cracks and all students' needs are met. Two school districts have developed a very thorough system to identify all students' needs including gifted students.

Only two negative features of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students were perceived: more time needed to fully implement the MTSS/RtII Framework and more

consistency of the framework among elementary schools and middle schools. Educators always need more time to do their jobs, but with the consistency, participants mentioned there was a different perception among teachers in different buildings. Currently, those administrators are planning ways to implement the MTSS/RtII Framework in those schools by providing a gifted support teacher who shares the same mindset as the administrators.

Research Question 2

The second research question, "What are the perceptions of the Pennsylvania's elementary administrators in regards to the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted student data analysis and alignment of instruction?" was addressed. With the demands of the Pennsylvania Core Standards and the Educator Effectiveness Model, there is an effort to ensure that a process truly improves student achievement with all students, gifted students included. Helping teachers to build their instructional toolbox and use data for tiered instruction in order for all students to be successful is effective within a MTSS/RtII Framework. The use of different assessments with the MTSS/RtII Framework confirmed the increased need for data analysis and instructional decision-making. Progress monitoring and differentiated instruction continue to be an important topic for teachers.

All seven administrators discussed many ways in which research-based, standards-aligned practices were an essential component of their accountability as administrators. Participants mentioned the use of project based learning and dynamic assessments to discern gifted behaviors. Overall, participants thought that, the development of the MTSS/RtII Framework components with gifted elementary students allowed every student, whether labeled as gifted or not, to be challenged based on data and interest. Future research might be conducted

in areas of professional development for Tier III and on the application of teaching strategies like grade skipping and curriculum compacting.

Some administrators mentioned implementing two models with the gifted elementary students: Susan Winebrenner's cluster grouping model and Dan Treffinger's proposal, both referenced previously in this study. Participants alluded that systems thinking and theories, like Renzulli's theories (1977 & 1978) are a foundation for these two models which make an effective tiered system for gifted elementary students. The exploration of administrator perceptions regarding the implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students combined with theory was also emphasized by Renzulli (2006),

> For better or worse, I have never been content with developing theoretical concepts with devoting, equal or even greater attention to creating instruments, procedures, and materials for implementing the various concepts. And theory in an applied field does not have much value if it is not compatible with practical realities, such as policies, personalities, governance, finances, how schools work, teacher's way of knowing and practices that can reasonably be expected to endure beyond the support usually accorded to pilot projects or experimental research studies (Sternberg and Davidson, p. 247).

The definition of giftedness was analyzed through Renzulli's (1978) Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model theories. Through interviews with elementary administrators, before the MTSS/RtII Implementation, there were some concerns about labeling some students as gifted while other students were not getting the same opportunities to be challenged. Renzulli's theories present components: above average ability, creativity, and task commitment, and three challenge levels (Enrichment Type I, II, III) that interact so students can be challenged successfully.

In order to meet individual needs, data team meetings and teacher leaders were mentioned as a must for data analysis and alignment of instruction. All participants referred to their data teams as the basis for the MTSS/RtII Framework. The administrators met with their teams on a regular basis and discussed universal screeners, formative and summative assessments, performance based assessments, students' needs, students' interests, etc. If parents and students needed to be part of that team, they were included. Like the data meetings, all participants mentioned having teacher leaders in the elementary schools. These individuals also had different titles like academic specialists, but their role was similar: to assist teachers with their high achievers and assist gifted students inside and outside the classrooms. With positive perceptions noted, one negative perception was that the state assessment results do not help gifted students achieve in specific areas. Although students do well because they have already mastered the concepts for their grade level, recommendations for future achievement based on gifted students' performances on the state assessment would benefit schools and students.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, "What underlying themes emerge from interviews with Pennsylvania elementary administrators about the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students?" Three themes came to light: curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessments, and collaboration/leadership.

Curriculum/Instruction

With Pennsylvania's Value-Added Assessment System scores, teacher/school accountability are directly tied to student achievement; this is in itself a strong motivator for administrators and teachers to buy into the MTSS/RtII's process of using ongoing measurements to inform planning a delivery of instruction. Participants responded favorably to the

incorporation of the PA Core Standards and the Educator Effectiveness Model. They responded that the implementation of these changes came at the right time for the implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework with all students including gifted students. Participants were pleased with effective instructional practices, like differentiated instruction, used on a daily basis in the classrooms for all students' success not just the gifted students. Professional development is offered in different ways but is teacher driven based on teacher need (differentiated instruction) and student need in all of the schools interviewed. One participant mentioned that he/she did not call the framework, RtI but, as he/she talked, he/she referenced all of the components. If needed, some participants mentioned providing transportation for elementary students to attend upper level classes in the middle school.

Data Analysis/Assessment

With all stakeholders understanding the relevance of using data analysis and assessments to meet the needs of potentially gifted students, the MTSS/RtII Framework serves as a foundation for nurturing gifted qualities through a systemic process of tiered interventions. School districts are continuously monitoring students' progress so high achievers are moving beyond ceiling benchmarks. These students' interests and needs are met by looking at the data and planning instruction accordingly with or with a gifted label. Progress monitoring and benchmark assessments are given on a regular basis and monitored constantly by data teams and teacher leaders, along with administrators, classroom teachers, parents, and students. Participants mentioned that implementing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students is the new "norm". In order for all students' needs to be met, a system has to be in place and followed thoroughly. Even though it was hard for some parents to give up that elitist mentality, parents

were involved in meetings and have noticed positive gains with their gifted students with or without a label of giftedness.

Collaboration/ Leadership

Collaboration was also mentioned during the interviews. Collaboration between academic specialists, interventionists, gifted coaches, or gifted teachers is the key to make this implementation successful. Teacher buy-in or mindset was mentioned by several administrators as necessary process for the implementation of MTSS/RtII. Once there is teacher buy-in and teachers notice positive results with their students, administrators started to observe a wave of other teachers committing to the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with their students. All administrators shared a need for leadership in this implementation and provide the resources, professional development, and a master schedule to make it happen.

In some districts the transition to multi-tiered systems of support was supported by collaboration with intermediate units and other educational opportunities provided by the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN). While all participants are developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students, the stages of implementation and procedures are slightly different. Changes to the Pennsylvania Core Standards and Educator Effectiveness Model have improved teacher buy-in to new methods to assist the gifted students in their classrooms and intervention times.

While collaboration and leadership has to happen among teachers and outside agencies, parent collaboration was also mentioned by administrators as a necessity. Participants wanted to talk to parents about their needs and their child's needs. Parent meetings were listed as essential in communicating the vision of meeting the student's needs and interests. Students also have to be part of this team. According to Renzulli's (1977 & 1978) theories, educators have to meet

students' interests. All stakeholders need to be involved so all students within the MTSS/RtII Framework are successful and challenged with or without a formal evaluation. Even though parent input into curriculum needs to improve, by the perceptions of the administrators, parent support of the MTSS/RtII Framework was noted. Parents, as noted by the participants, favored not waiting a certain amount of time for an evaluation to be conducted or a label to be assigned as long as their child's needs and interests were met.

Summary

Administrators alluded that all stakeholders should have an understanding of the MTSS/RtII components for successful implementation. Figure 2 in Chapter Two of this study (Dufour & Marzano, 2011) demonstrates that administrator actions lead to teacher actions in which lead to student achievement. "Senge's systems thinking model described a framework relevant for any learning organizations working toward a long-term goal (2006). People within the organizations must use their capabilities to enhance the organization as a whole by working in a systematic way. For educational organizations, systems thinking provided direction for school leaders implementing change within the school system. Lunenburg (2011) reflected on the work of Senge and further defines seven considerations within systems thinking: (a) support continuous learning opportunities; (b) promote inquiry and dialogue; (c) encourage collaboration and team learning; (d) create systems to capture and share learning; (e) empower people towards a collective vision; (f) connect the organization to its environment, and (g) provide strategic leadership for learning" (Prager, 2015, p. 111). These considerations correlating to the systems thinking model could be applied to the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted elementary students: the system at the state level, the district level, and at the school level. Interviews with elementary administrators included some degree of understanding into each level.

The systems thinking approach, part of this study's theoretical framework because it builds conception of how multiple systems can be more efficient when implemented with collaboration and organization, was perceived by most participants in this study to be strong at the state level. The concept of creating systems to capture and share learning was managed through the evolution of the MTSS/RtII Framework. As perceived by some participants, PaTTAN supported them by promoting inquiry and dialogue with teachers about the MTSS/RtII Framework and by leading teachers toward a collective vision through data analysis and team meetings.

In each school district, participants recognized systems thinking components. All participants shared how their school districts were helpful in providing professional development for teachers through the intermediate units and PaTTAN. One participant stated that Friday afternoons were scheduled for collaboration time while another participant mentioned that learning opportunities were offered digitally to support team learning and collaboration.

In the elementary buildings, administrators defined their roles to provide necessary leadership skills to fully develop the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. They acknowledged that their leadership roles as being essential to successful implementation. Administrators also discussed the effective communication with teachers and parents. By incorporating team meetings, participants wanted to show that teachers do have the power to make positive change for meeting the needs of gifted elementary students.

It is critical that the systems thinking model be considered when states and districts are implementing a multi-tiered systems of support with gifted students. In the following section, the MTSS/RtII framework's implications for administrators, districts, states, and colleges/universities will be described.

Implications for Practitioners

Gifted education has been a concern for years. Researchers have examined different definitions of giftedness (Davis, 2006; Dai & Chen, 2014; Renzulli, 1999; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). The Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students was the primary focus for this study. Its implications for administrators, school districts, and states across the country, and policymakers are imperative regarding gifted education. Recommendations with the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted elementary students will be presented in the next sections.

Administrators

Teaching and learning have become more demanding with state requirements like the Pennsylvania's Core Standards and Value-Added Assessment System; a daunting but worthy consequence is the challenge of meeting the needs of every child in the classroom (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Coleman & Johnsen, 2001). Implementing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students and knowing its tiers impact administrators. This study highlights some recommendations by respondents in this study who are developing this new model for gifted elementary students.

Administrators should understand Renzulli's theories (1977 & 1978) with systems thinking in order to challenge high-end problem solvers. Administrators, being school leaders, have the opportunity to implement change. They can lead teachers towards change and describe each tier specifically. Administrators should set specific expectations for teachers' roles. This can be done through professional development and team meetings. In order for successful implementation and change, effective communication has to be an incorporated.

Administrators must possess data analysis skills. These skills must be developed through ongoing opportunities at data meetings so students are placed in the appropriate tier and receive services based on their interests and needs. School leaders must be ready to support teacher and parent buy-in. They must be ready to provide them with data analysis knowledge and ways to apply that knowledge to teaching. They have to gain communication skills so that dialogue with teachers and parents about gifted education reform and about meeting the children's gifted needs through the MTSS/RtII Framework is effective.

School District

With MTSS/RtII implementation, districts have to evaluate the process and look towards future revisions. From responses in this study, several administrators wanted to continue the framework through other elementary schools and middle schools in their districts. In one school district, for example, not all of its elementary schools were developing the MTSS/RtII Framework. In order to be consistent, every elementary school in the district needs to share the same theories and practices.

Professional development was also discussed. District decision makers need to listen to teachers and administrators and provide professional development that supports identified areas of need and aligns with the challenges of meeting gifted students' needs. In-service days and other training days are often set aside to meet mandatory trainings inherent in state mandates. Nevertheless, when school districts recognize the importance of allotting time so teachers can learn more about data analysis, intervention strategies, and the tiered system altogether, buy-in by teachers and staff will grow in strength.

States and Policymakers

As the MTSS/RtII Framework is an intervention model for early identification, and includes a sequential system to meet all students' needs, some implications can offer for consideration by state departments of education and other policymaking organizations. With Pennsylvania educators having other demands (Core standards, the Educator Effectiveness Model, and the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System), additional states should carefully consider the hidden needs of gifted students. This consideration should include implementation of MTSS/RtII or similar interventions with gifted students in order to enhance communication, provide opportunities for training, and promote collaboration among those directly implementing the Framework with gifted students.

Some participants in this study shared the concern about the state assessment in relation to the gifted students. Because these tests evaluate every student in the same way and neglect to measure beyond the ceiling of grade-level expectations, respondents felt that the state's data did not have relevance to gifted students' current educational outcomes. States might consider refining value-added models with suggestions and recommendations for providing gifted students and their teachers with the best teaching and learning strategies. Examples include acceleration, grade skipping, and/or curriculum compacting. States must also provide appropriate training to teachers and administrators to understand giftedness and the applications of "best teaching practices" based on needs and interests and, further, that data are analyzed effectively to provide tiered instruction. Gifted teacher programs, while mandated in some states, are not required for Pennsylvania teacher certifications. Although courses were recently developed for the teachers of gifted students there is currently no "teacher of gifted" certification in the state of Pennsylvania. In states that do offer this degree, knowledge of multi-tiered systems

of support, curriculum/instruction, data analysis/assessment, and leadership/collaboration, systems thinking, and Renzulli's theories (1977 & 1978) should be included in the certification process.

Teacher/Administrator Preparation Programs

Colleges and universities need to review their programs to provide teachers and administrators the correct tools for the requirements of meeting gifted students' interests and needs in their classrooms. Programs should include courses on a multi-tiered systems of support approach with Renzulli's theories (1977 & 1978) and systems thinking as the foundation. Required courses should include data analysis, differentiation instruction, and progress monitoring regarding meeting gifted students' needs. When new teachers and administrators are being certified, they will have a strong, core knowledge of this tiered system, since the MTSS/RtII Framework or intervention model might become a responsibility as a classroom teacher and an administrator.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher considered if teachers should have been involved throughout this study. Since teachers are in the front lines of the battle for student achievement, their perceptions, as practitioners, might have provided a second perspective to the study that included administrators as leaders of change. A third element might have been interviewing parents since parent collaboration was mentioned by all participants as being a high priority.

Another limitation was the number of participants; while seven respondents provided excellent insight, there were only four school districts identified as developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students by a statewide gifted liaison within the state of PA. The possibility exists that input from a larger pool of administrators might have yielded some

additional or different perspectives. With seven administrators, currently developing multi-tiered systems of support with gifted elementary students, agreeing to participate, it is possible that a larger sample size would be more generalizable across districts and states.

Finally, since the study investigated perceptions of seven elementary administrators from one state (Pennsylvania), the results may not apply to the other states, but may provide more information regarding early identification, data analysis, and implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. Each participant was interviewed only once. It is possible that, the inclusion of other interviews or focus groups could have resulted in additional data helpful to this study.

Future Research Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate a need for future research. Considerations could be to include different methodologies and procedures. A follow-up study could be completed with the same participants after another year or years of developing the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. Middle schools that implement the framework could also be included in the qualitative study. Since the MTSS/RtII Framework has been updated and changed, there is little research correlated with gifted education. Research could be completed that would involve different administrators as they incorporate the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students in their schools. This process could lead to a longitudinal study that explores a cohort of administrators' practices over time (Prager, 2015). Researchers might investigate the state policy's role in mandating gifted education, gifted teacher's certification, and correlating gifted education with the MTSS/RtII Framework.

Another alternative could be to utilize quantitative methodology for future explorations regarding perceptions of the MTSS/RtII Framework and gifted elementary students. Since the

pool was limited to schools that are developing the MTSS/RtII Framework as recommended by a state gifted liaison, a case study could also be conducted. While student achievement data were mentioned in general terms, specific student data were not included. Analyzing the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment scores, Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System scores, and other specific data related to the individual students might be part of future research.

Conclusion

Rigorous curriculum, best instructional practices, thorough data analysis and assessments, and effective collaboration and leadership are all integral parts of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. While administrators have many demands placed upon them, they nevertheless need to be leaders in supporting gifted student achievement. Administrator need to be change agents and support the implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students so high achieving students continue to be challenged and successful.

The researcher found that administrators had many positive perceptions regarding the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. In collecting data from seven administrators, it was enlightening to talk to other elementary administrators about their perceptions and experiences with the MTSS/RtII Framework. Even though the four school districts differed geographically and in terms of socioeconomic status, with each district developing components of the MTSS/RtII Framework differently, the elementary administrators perceived the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students positively correlating with higher student achievement for all students.

Administrators stressed the relevance of school data and team meetings: data analysis and intervention meetings, and professional development opportunities. Some administrators used

aspects of systems thinking in developing their MTSS/RtII Framework, maintaining interrelated components.

This study showed the value of using a systems thinking approach to initiate and maintain change. An understanding of Renzulli's theories (1977 & 1978) and systems thinking will enhance implementation of the MTSS/RtII Framework. These theories' components can help administrators create an effective tiered system that promotes gifted education. This research combined with previous research regarding Response to Intervention will assist educators and state policy makers in creating meaningful multi-tiered systems of support for gifted elementary students.

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Appendix A

Administrator Informed Consent Cover Letter

Dear Administrator,

I am a student in the Doctoral Program in the Administrative and Leadership Studies Program in the Department of Professional Studies in Education at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am inviting you to participate in this study in an effort to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions of administrators with regards to the Pennsylvania's Multi-Tiered Support Systems / Response to Instruction and Intervention Framework with gifted elementary students. There are no known risks to participate in this study.

You are invited to participate in a study to explore how administrators perceive the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision as to whether or not you would like to participate.

My study will be based on information collected through an interview with you. The tape-recorded interview will take approximately one hour and will focus on questions related to the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students.

As an administrator myself, I understand how busy an administrator's day can be. By taking time to talk with me about your school, we can inform other educators about the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in the strictest of confidence. You will not be identified by name, school, or district. In the event the findings in this study are published, pseudonyms will be used to conceal the identities of the participants. Participants may withdraw at any time by notifying the principal investigator via email at LHRD@iup.edu. If you withdraw from the study, there are no penalties and all data pertaining to your involvement in the study will be destroyed.

Within the next week, I will contact you to answer any questions and determine if you are willing to participate in this study.

Thank you for your consideration.

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact me by phone or email at the information provided below:

Cell Phone: (814) 659-0201

Work Phone: (814) 749-8421

Email: LHRD@iup.edu

Your time and cooperation is very much appreciated. Thank you for considering my invitation to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Tricia M. Murin

Principal Investigator:

Tricia M. Murin
Doctoral Candidate, IUP
418 South Cherry Street
Ebensburg, PA 15931
(814) 472-6431

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This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730)

Appendix B

Voluntary Consent Form

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a participant in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdrawal at any time through personal conversation, written communication, phone call, or email. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT)_____

Signature_____

Date_____

Phone number or location where you can be reached_____

Best days and times to reach you_____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

_____ _____

Investigator's Signature **Date**

Appendix C

Alignment of Interview and Research Questions

Interview questions	Research question	Applicable theory
1. How long has your school implemented the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students?	RQ 1	Systems thinking
2. Describe how the implementation of the Pennsylvania's MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted elementary students has changed the way gifted services are provided.	RQ 1	Systems thinking
3. Describe the universal screener used, and the screening process for identifying gifted students.	RQ 2	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness /Triad Enrichment Model
4. How is the progress monitoring implemented with the gifted students?	RQ 2	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness/Triad Enrichment Model
5. How is differentiated instruction implemented with the gifted students in general education?	RQ 2	Systems thinking
6. How are parents more involved in the use of the MTSS/RtII Framework with gifted students?	RQ 3	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness / Triad Enrichment Model
7. Describe the positive and negative features of the MTSS/RtII Framework with elementary gifted students.	RQ 1	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness /Triad Enrichment Model

8. How has a focus on high quality instruction changed classrooms to meet the needs of gifted students?	RQ 2	Systems thinking
9. Describe the collaborative efforts among teachers and parents within the MTSS/RtII Framework regarding gifted instruction and outcomes.	RQ 2	Systems thinking
10. How is your school meeting gifted students' needs through the MTSS/RtII Framework?	RQ 3	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness / Enrichment Triad Model
11. Compare the value of professional development for you and the teachers regarding gifted education before and after the MTSS/RtII implementation.	RQ 3	Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness / Triad Enrichment Model
12. Explain how the MTSS/RtII Framework is effective for the gifted students.	RQ 3	Systems thinking