

# Using Tiered Instruction in Preschool: Interviews with Early Reading First Project Leaders

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# Disclaimer

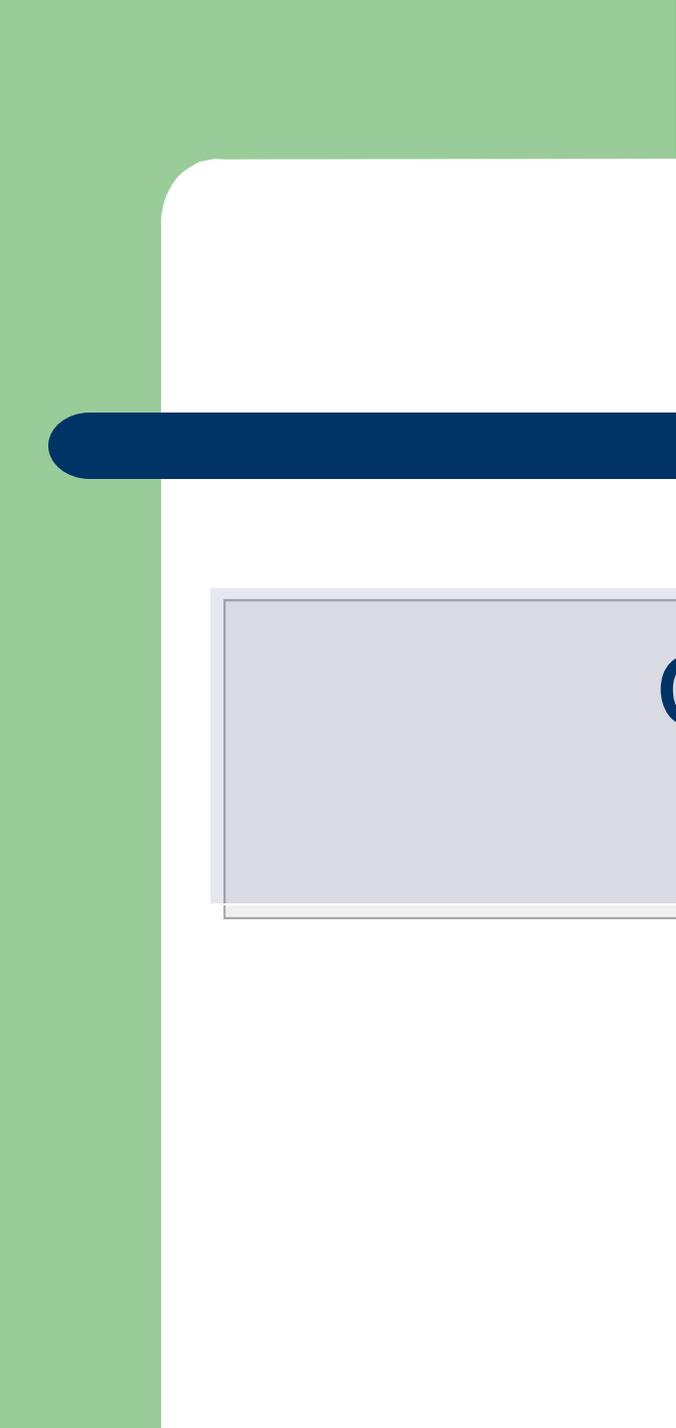
- Assessment tools and other information and materials mentioned or shown by presenters or grantees are provided as resources and examples for the viewer's convenience. Their inclusion is not intended as an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, the instructional practices and assessments discussed or shown in this presentation is not intended to mandate, direct, or control a State's, local educational agency's, or school's specific instructional content, academic achievement system and assessments, curriculum, or program of instruction. States and local programs are free to use any instructional content, achievement system and assessments, curriculum, or program instruction that they wish, so long as the instructional materials and literacy activities meet the Early Reading First statutory requirement of being based on scientifically based reading research that supports the age-appropriate development of the language and literacy skills described in the Early Reading First statute, and are part of their approved grant application.

# ERF Project Director

- “I think the biggest “aha” for the teachers was **analyzing the data** with them... That is how we got them to buy into **differentiating** instruction [and] **individualizing** instruction for children. That was their big buy-in for locating **small groups**, because [scheduling] that was a difficult change for them.”

# Session Objectives

- Provide a context for the study
- Provide an overview of study procedures
- Discuss the results of the study
- Discuss recommendations and future directions based on the study



# Context for the Study

# Components of RTI Models

## (National Center on RTI; Coleman & Buysse)

- Integrated system of ...
  - Universal screening (all children, in specified area(s) of learning)
  - Progress monitoring on specific learning outcomes
  - Multi-tiered prevention/intervention system; increasingly intense levels of instruction (core curriculum, targeted and/or more frequent intervention)
  - Data based decision-making (use of data to adjust intensity and nature of interventions)
  - Collaborative decision-making

# Primary Differences among Tiers (RTI Action Network)

- Intensity/quantity (duration, frequency) of instruction
- Focus of instruction (targeted skill set; targeted level within skill set)
- Level of progress monitoring

# Early Reading First

- Federal grant program
  - U.S. Dept. of Education (3-year projects)
  - Community with high number of low-income families
  - Focus on emergent language & literacy in 3-4 year old children
  - Primary activities: Research-based literacy curriculum, classroom resources, professional development
  - Partnerships with and among community entities providing care & education to young children, including school district

# ERF Requirements

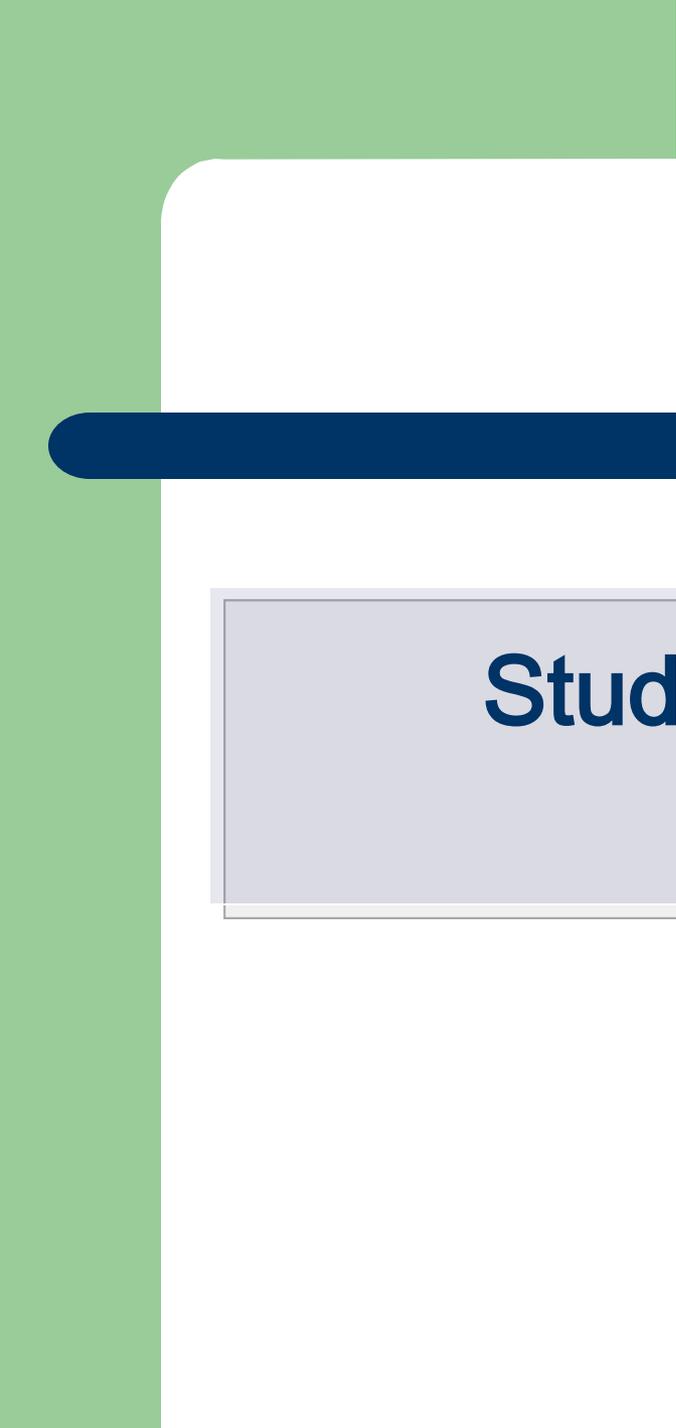
- **Curriculum**
  - “Research-based” emergent literacy curriculum; all areas of emergent literacy addressed
- **Assessment** (screening, monitoring; benchmarks set)
  - PPVT (minimum of twice/year)
  - Upper-case alphabet (minimum of twice/year)
- **Literacy-rich Environment**
  - ELLCO (minimum of once/year)
- **Professional development** – substantial, often including weekly or more frequent coaching

# Rationale for the study

- Definitions of what constitutes RTI or multi-tiered intervention vary in the literature
- Emerging literacy skills and a well developed vocabulary are goals for many Pre-K programs, especially those serving children “at risk”
- RTI is a new concept in many Pre-K programs
- Language and emergent literacy are to date the most common focus of RTI in Pre-K
- Early Reading First projects had the opportunity (and funding) to implement tiered models of intervention in emergent language and literacy

# Research questions

1. How did projects approach tiered instruction?
2. What features characterized Tiers 2 and 3 (assessments, criteria for selecting children, intervention, logistics) of RTI?
3. What challenges did projects encounter in implementing RTI?
4. What were project leaders' perceptions of contributors to sustainability of RTI post-project?
5. What recommendations would project leaders make for implementation of RTI in Pre-K?



# **Study Methods & Procedures**

# Participants

- Between 2004 and 2010, USDE funded applications to implement and demonstrate emergent literacy teaching in Pre-K
- The terms “tiered,” “multi –tiered,” and “RTI” began appearing in Abstracts of funded projects in 2004 (1 project) and increased over the years (7 projects in 2009)
- Total of 23 projects (19 unduplicated lead agencies & project directors) using these terms were identified from the abstracts
- Key staff or coordinators from 18 projects (14 unduplicated) agreed to be interviewed (78% of total possible) during Spring, 2011
- Projects represented ranged from completed projects to 1<sup>st</sup> year of implementation

# Characteristics of Programs

- All programs were in low-income communities
- Majority of children were high-needs based on family income
- Settings were in rural to urban settings, with from 4 – 12 classrooms
- Lead agencies were primarily districts and universities
- Programs included Head Start, child care, pre-school public, pre-K charter, and faith-based centers
- Teaching staff ranged from high-school graduates to MA with certification

# Interview Protocol

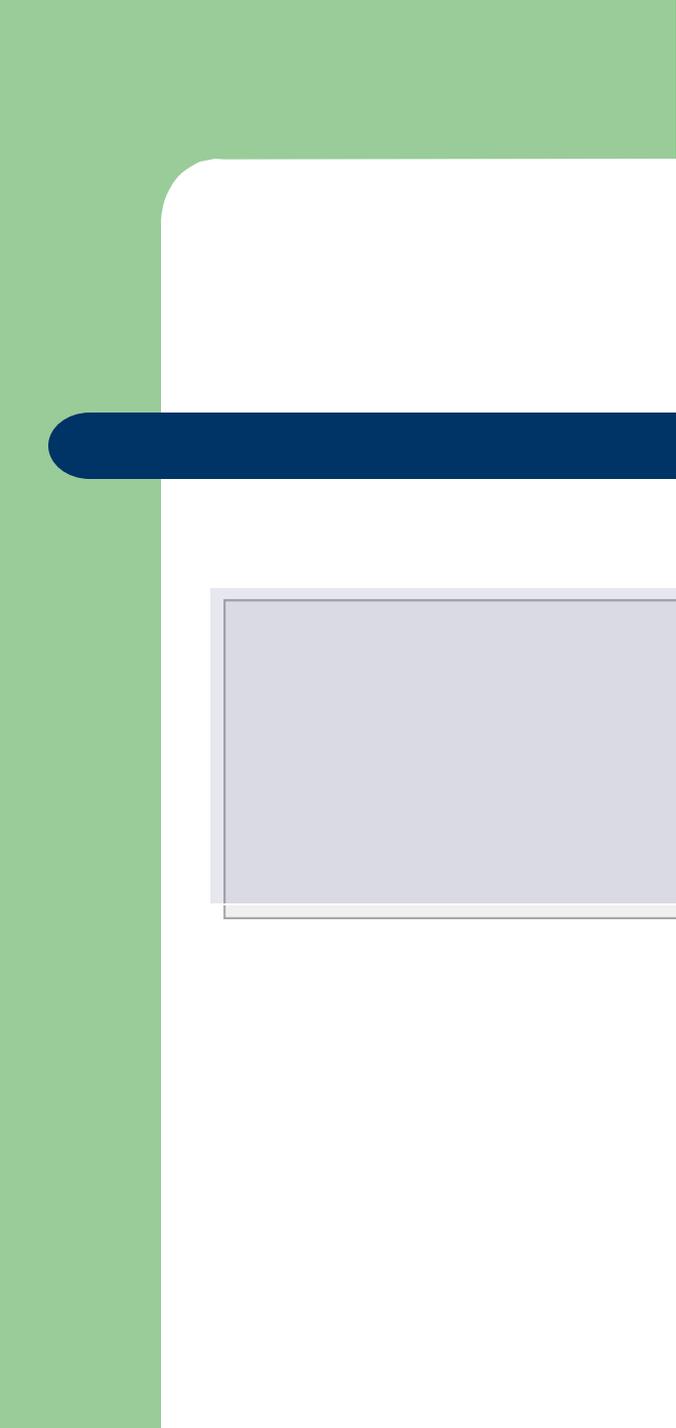
- Semi structured, recorded, transcribed telephone interview, approximately one hour in length
  - Description of program (demographics, settings)
  - Description of each of Tiers 1, 2 and 3 (e.g., curriculum, assessments)
  - For Tiers 2 and 3 – procedures & criteria for selection of children for RTI and movement between tiers
  - Challenges to implementing a tiered model
  - Factors influencing sustainability
  - Recommendations for moving forward

# Content Analysis

- All recorded conversations transcribed
- The authors
  - Read and reread each transcript
  - For each Tier:
    - transferred descriptions of key elements of interventions to tables
    - identified issues and challenges
  - Summarized more general comments related to sustainability and recommendations
  - Met to discuss coding of each interview addressing any differences through consensus

# Analysis (continued)

- Categories related to implementation within Tiers included:
  - Curriculum
  - Teaching formats (timing, grouping, staffing patterns)
  - Assessments/Monitoring (what, when)
  - Decision process for movement between tiers (criteria)
  - Fidelity to curriculum protocol (how, who)
- Narrative statements summarized into:
  - Types of issues & challenges
  - Types of factors influencing likely sustainability
  - Recommendations for achieving RTI



# Results

# Background Information – Characteristics of Tier 1

- **Initial assessments (fall)**
  - Required by ERF (PPVT, PALS capital letters)
  - Typical additions (other areas of PALS, IGDIs)
  - Other additions (GRTR, TOPEL, DIBELS, ALL, language samples, own assessments)
- **Ongoing assessment (winter, spring)**
  - More frequent repeat of all or some fall assessments
  - Curriculum-based measures (project developed, from curriculum, published [e.g., IGDIs])
    - Frequency - end of curriculum unit; a set schedule such as monthly; a set schedule such as weekly for a few “marker” children

# Tier 1 (continued) - Curriculum

- Curriculum
  - Broad early childhood curriculum that included focus on emergent literacy (e.g., *Creative Curriculum*)
  - Emergent literacy curriculum targeting multiple areas of language and literacy (e.g., *OWLS*, *Trophies*)
  - Extensions
    - Supplemented with additional, more targeted literacy curricula (e.g., phonological awareness)
    - Project developed protocols and materials

# Question 1 – Definitions of a Tiered Model

- **Differentiated instruction** (no difference in intensity)
  - Children grouped based on curriculum goals – different groups receive different content
  - Children grouped based on level within content areas – different groups have same curriculum but taught differently (e.g., direct instruction or open-ended activity)
- **Increased intensity** – specific children selected for additional time (better fit with definitions of RTI)
  - Extra small group
  - Extra time 1-1

# Question 2 – What features characterized Tier 2?

## CRITERIA FOR SELECTING CHILDREN

- Approaches Used
  - Status measures (fall or winter status measures)
  - Progress monitoring
    - Compare fall and winter status measures
    - More frequent tracking via CBMs, IGDIs
  - Professional judgment
  - Combination
- Who decides
  - Project staff, with input from program administrators and teachers
  - Information then shared with teachers

# Examples of Selection Criteria

- Status
  - Lowest scoring children up to XX slots available in classroom
  - Lowest XX% of children (e.g., 20-25%)
  - Cut score (s) on one or combination of assessments
- Progress
  - Progress on CBMs within specified time (e.g., 10 lessons, 2 months)
- Combination
  - Risk or marginal status on status measures plus lack of progress on CBMs

# WHAT DID INTERVENTION LOOK LIKE IN TIERED MODELS?

## Content

- Part of Tier 1 curriculum (differentiated instruction)
- Repeat (additional dosage) of Tier 1 activities
- A different curriculum but matched with themes and/or vocabulary from Tier 1
- A different curriculum – no connection to Tier 1 curriculum

## Variations

- Target specific areas of emergent literacy vs. cover most areas)
- All children get same content vs. different children get different content

# Logistics of achieving increased intensity

When Tier 2 was defined as differentiated instruction:

- Frequency
  - Differentiated instruction only – 3-5 days a week, 20-30 min.
  - Additional time added – 2-3 days/week, 20-30 min.
- Format for increased intensity
  - 1-1
  - Small group, sometimes pulled from across classrooms
- Who implements
  - Project staff (e.g., coaches)
  - University students
  - Specialized personnel (e.g., speech pathologists, special education)

# Logistics of achieving increased intensity (continued)

## When Tier 2 was defined as increased intensity

- Frequency
  - 2-3 days per week, often during center time
  - 10-30 minutes per session
- Format
  - small group, based on selection criteria (most typical)
  - occasionally 1-1 or pairs
- Who implements
  - Teachers (usually with extra teachers added into classroom)
  - Tutors (e.g., retired teachers, university students)
  - Project staff (e.g., coaches)

# Structure of lessons

- Activity-based
  - designed by teachers to address target skills
  - designed by project staff to address target skills
- Scripted lessons
  - designed by project staff to address target skills (e.g., code skills, target vocabulary)
  - supplemental, published curriculum (e.g., code skills)

# Ongoing monitoring

- Approach
  - Same tools as Tier 1 but used more frequently (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly, monthly)
    - Implemented by same individuals as Tier 1 monitoring or those delivering Tier 2
  - Different tools from Tier 1 (e.g., CBMs on Tier 2 target skills, probes on vocabulary) (as well as more frequently)
    - Usually implemented by those delivering Tier 2

## ***Example A: Scripted, Focus on Code Skills***

- Focus: Phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge
- Organization: Scripted lessons from separate, published curriculum; direct instruction
- Format: Small groups, 3 days per week; re-teach same code skills as in Tier 1, two children, during center time
- Who implements: teachers

## ***Example B: Scripted, All Areas of Emergent Literacy***

- Focus: Code skills and meaning skills
- Organization: Scripted lessons – direct instruction of code skills; meaning and print skills embedded into project-developed scripted books
- Format: 2 days per week, small group (3-4); 20-30 minutes per lesson; all children get same intervention, individualized within lesson
- Who implements: Tutors; eventually teachers if they achieve high quality Tier 1

# ***Example C: Semi-scripted, differentiated content within Tier 2***

**FOCUS** (with 2 groups of RTI receiving different content)

- Phonological awareness (lower scores)
- Letters, words and reading for meaning (higher scores)

**FORMAT**

- Different RTI groups, selected using district-developed assessments in above areas
- 30 minutes, 5 days/week
- Planned by coaches using specific template

**ORGANIZATION:** small group time, children pulled in pairs; might combine children from across classrooms

**WHO:** Coaches

## What features characterized Tier 3?

- Additional instruction beyond differentiated instruction (often described as Tier 2) (n=3)
- Additional instruction beyond Tier 2 (projects that increased frequency of Tier 2) (n=5)
- Special education services (n=3)
- “Not there yet” (n=3)

# Approaches to Tier 3 beyond Tier 2

- Joining cards (target specific children, **embed** goals within other activities)
- Pull out to reteach content for 2<sup>nd</sup> time
- Pull out based on Individual Learning Plan

# Criteria for moving between Tiers

- Move from Tier 1 to Tier 2 (selection, above)
- Move from Tier 2 to Tier 1
  - No longer meets criteria for Tier 2
  - Scoring same as children in Tier 1
  - Other children have lower scores (have greater need)
- Maintain in Tier 2
  - Still meet criteria and/or making little progress
  - No exit criteria set
- Move from Tier 2 to Tier 3
  - Lack of progress in Tier 2 (e.g., benchmark; specific # of data points)
  - Professional judgment indicates no response to Tier 2 (may be combined with rating)

## Question 3 – Challenges to Implementing RTI

- Overall quality of Tier 1; the time & energy it took to achieve high-quality Tier 1

*“The first year and a half we wanted to make sure everyone was firmly grounded in the curriculum and we had high quality instruction (TIER 1) before we could begin to say it’s not the instruction, it’s that we need to individualize more and move to a tiered model.”*

## Question 3 – Challenges to Implementing RTI

- Characteristics of children (turnover, percentage with low scores)

*“... amazing turnover. Its probably been one of the greatest challenges of our project”*

*“With this population essentially everybody was starting zeroed out...all needed intense, immediate structure”*

## Question 3 – Challenges to Implementing RTI

- Characteristics of teaching staff (number available, turnover, knowledge and ability, attitudes)

*“Teacher level of understanding of literacy and oral language instruction specifically, ... that was lacking. You can only teach what you know.”*

## Question 3 – Challenges to Implementing RTI

- Characteristics of non-teaching staff (number available, turnover, knowledge and ability, attitudes)

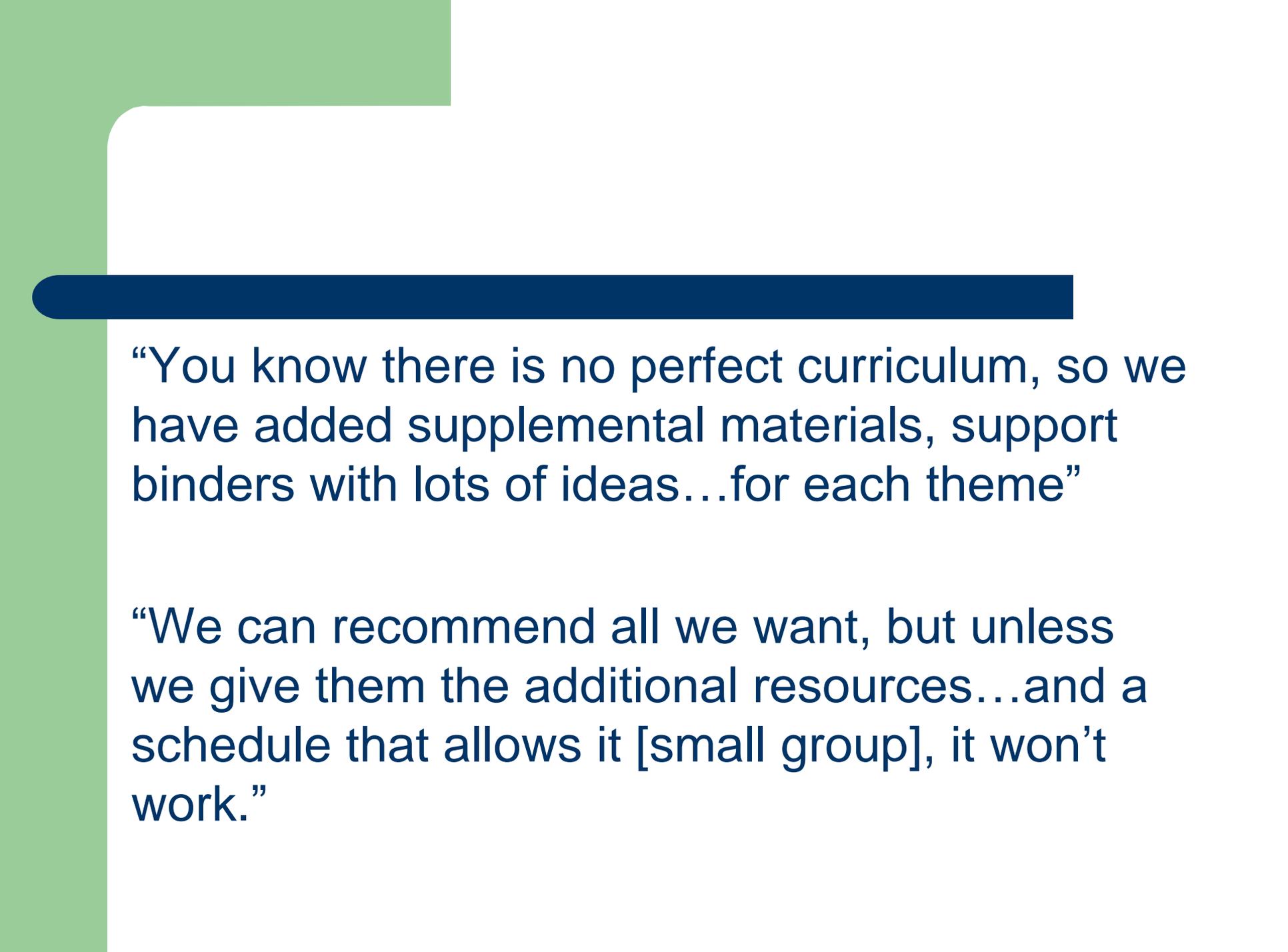
*“The district... had no clue what they had in mind for RTI... how it would be different than the RTI they would use in the upper grades”*

# Question 3 – System challenges to implementing RTI

- Local System/Program
  - Length of school day
  - Availability of:
    - Extra people to support Tier 2
    - Expertise in giving and interpreting assessments
    - Problem solving team
    - Knowledgeable supervisory staff
  - Knowledge of RTI
    - What it is, how it works, what it takes
    - Supervisory roles in relation to RTI
- State System
  - Policies (e.g., time, testing, direct instruction)

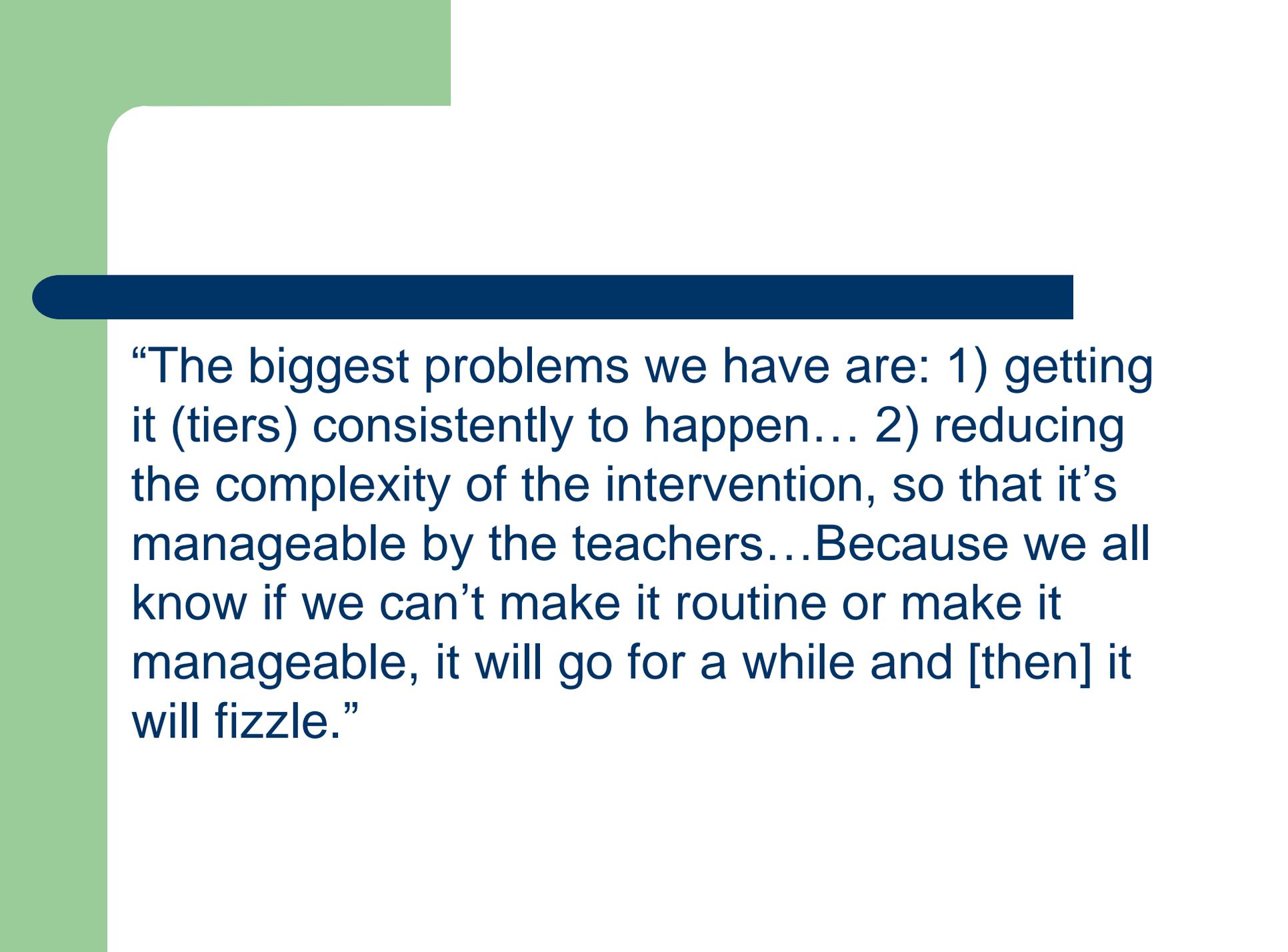
# Question 4 - Perceptions of Contributors to Sustainability

- Began project with higher quality classrooms (e.g., public schools, certified teachers)
- “Buy-in” by teachers and other staff re expectations and accountability
- Planned for sustainability within the project
  - Simplified assessments and curriculum
  - Established fidelity to the curriculum
  - Provided needed resources that will remain at the sites
  - Developed continuing Professional Development to use as staff turn over “buy in” (or training modules)



“You know there is no perfect curriculum, so we have added supplemental materials, support binders with lots of ideas...for each theme”

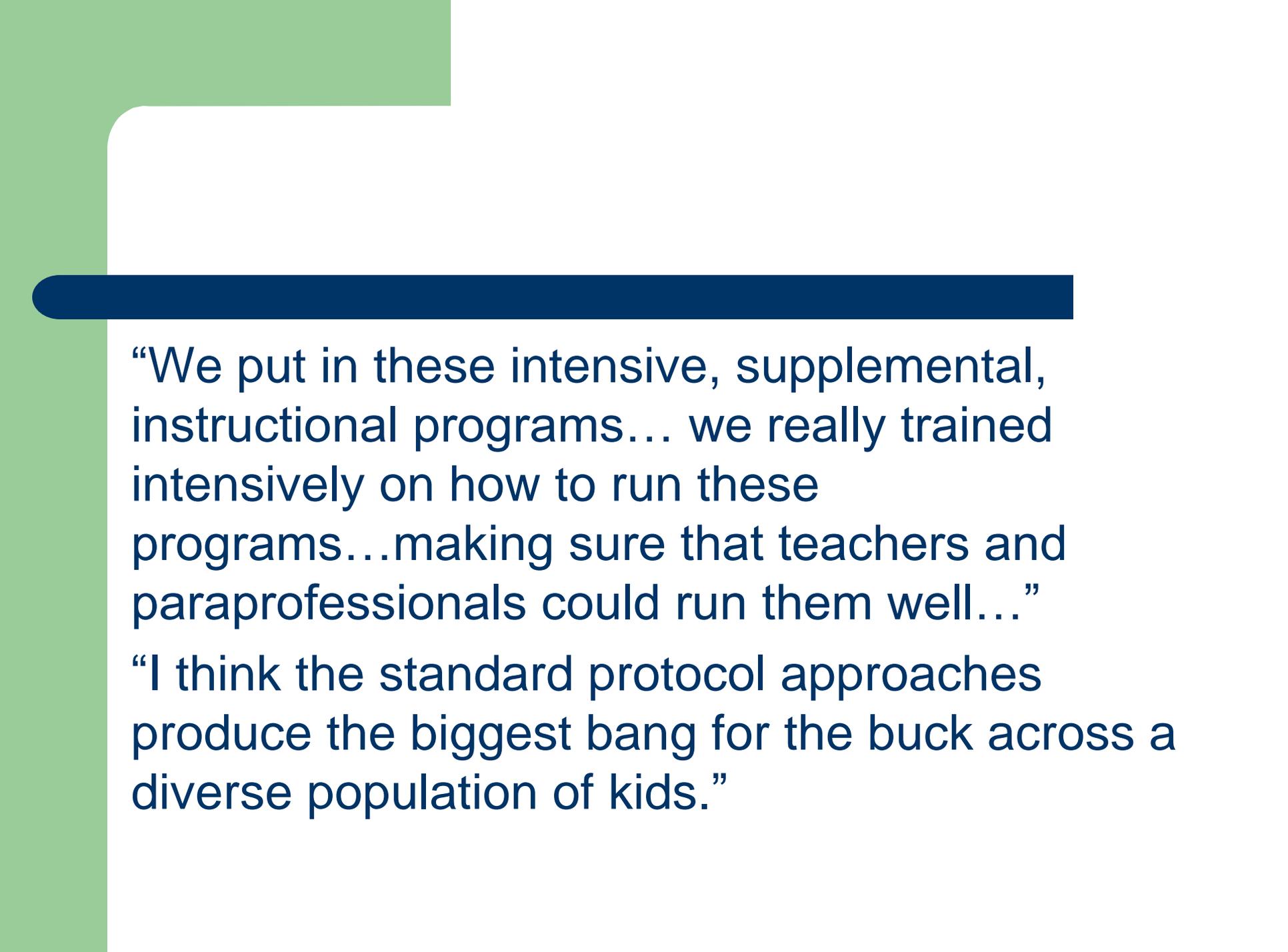
“We can recommend all we want, but unless we give them the additional resources...and a schedule that allows it [small group], it won't work.”



“The biggest problems we have are: 1) getting it (tiers) consistently to happen... 2) reducing the complexity of the intervention, so that it’s manageable by the teachers...Because we all know if we can’t make it routine or make it manageable, it will go for a while and [then] it will fizzle.”

## Question 5: What recommendations for achieving RTI?

- Teachers must have the necessary skills
- Systemic support must be in place to assist with resources, PD, coaching, assessments, collaborative decision-making
- Pre-k must be viewed as important and a true precursor to kindergarten and later achievement
- Proven Tier 2 curricula need to be developed and made available to the field
  - scripted lessons provide greater fidelity
  - Tier 2 be linked to Tier 1 so that children experience consistency in their learning



“We put in these intensive, supplemental, instructional programs... we really trained intensively on how to run these programs...making sure that teachers and paraprofessionals could run them well...”

“I think the standard protocol approaches produce the biggest bang for the buck across a diverse population of kids.”

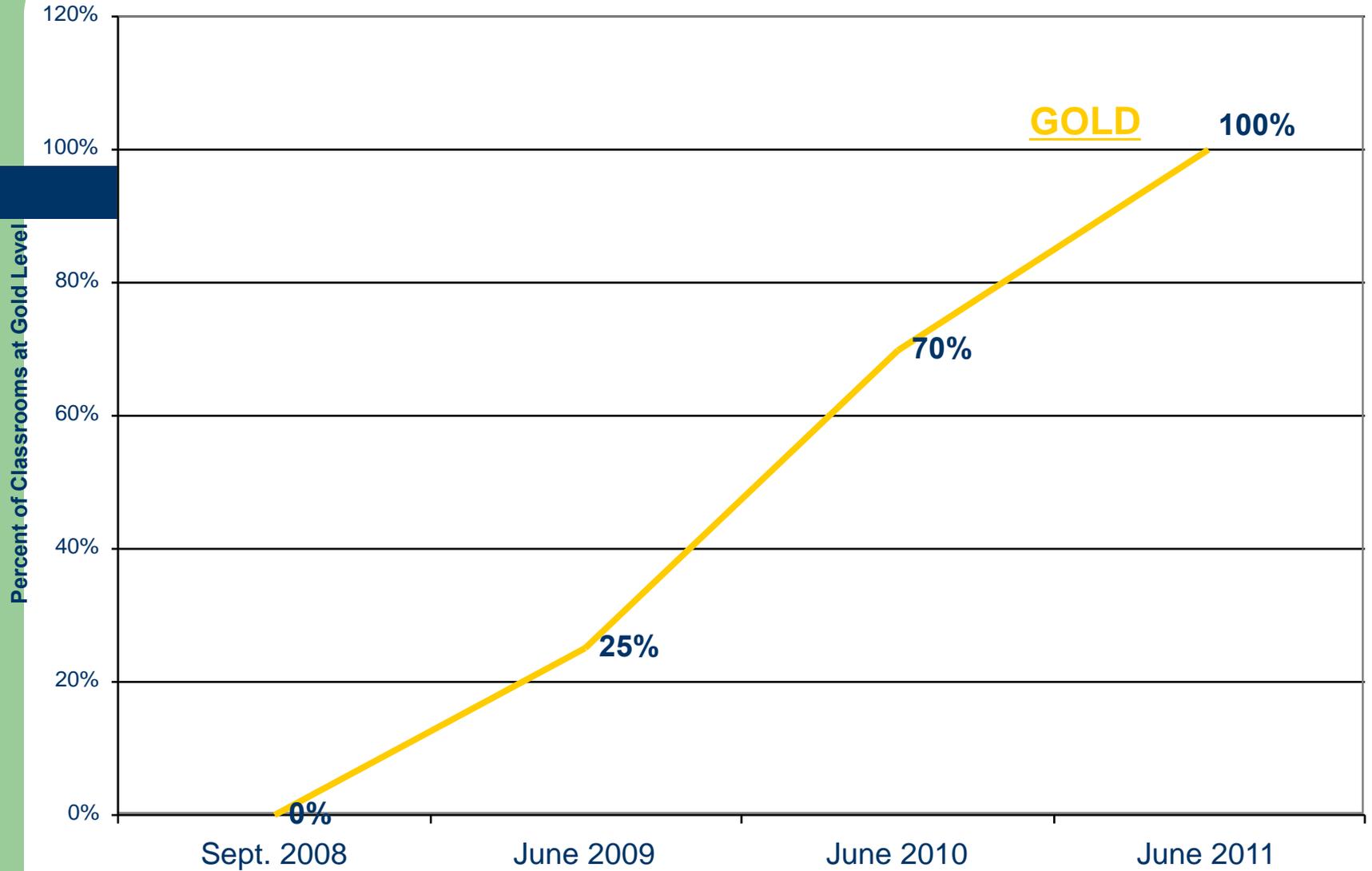
# Our Personal Story and What It Shows

We worked with 27 teachers/14 classrooms (Head Start, Child Care and Pre-K), providing intensive professional development through frequent coaching and monthly PD.

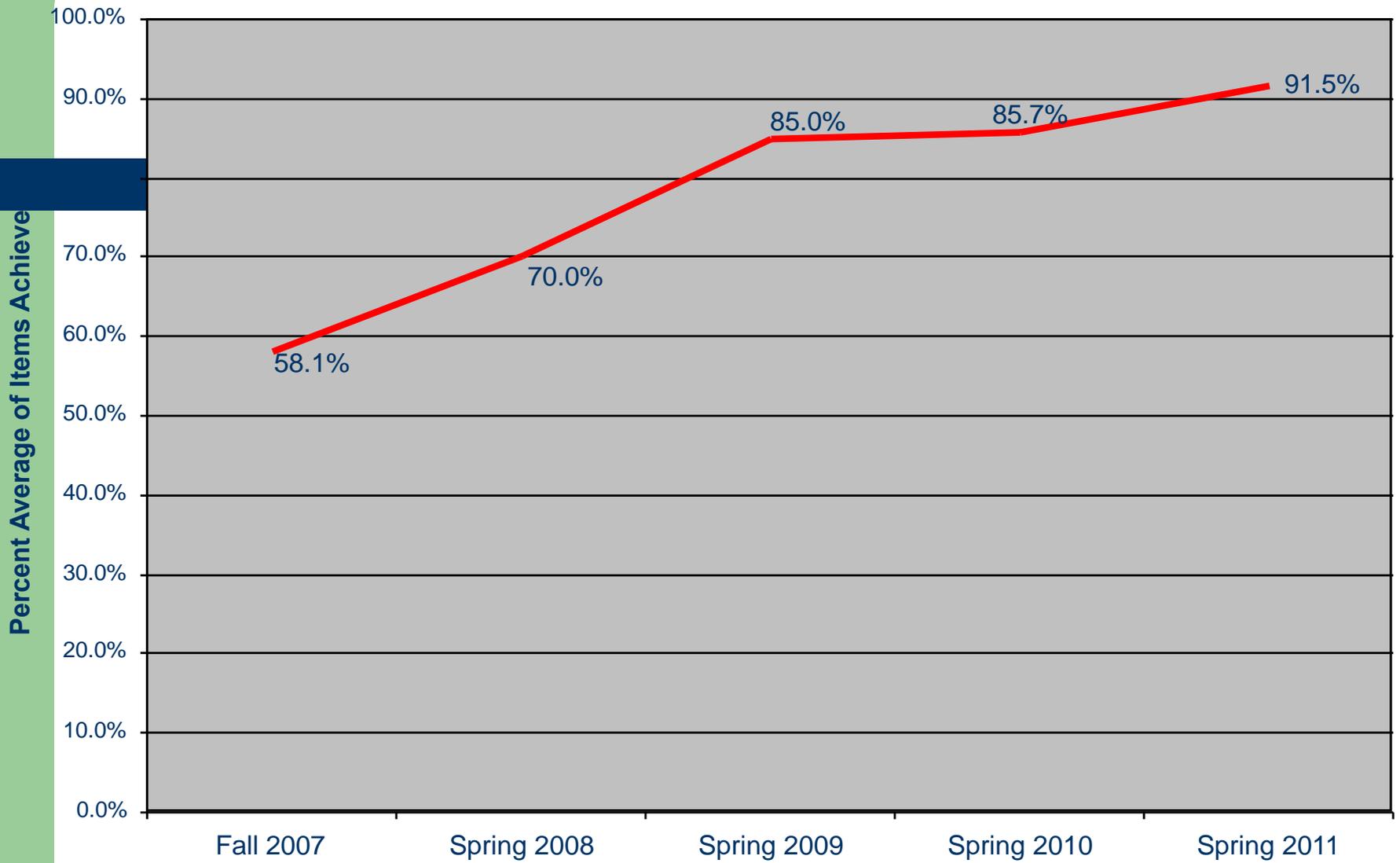
Focus on helping teachers to teach with intention

Focus on emerging literacy and oral language skills.

## CRIS Summary of Benchmarks Achieved

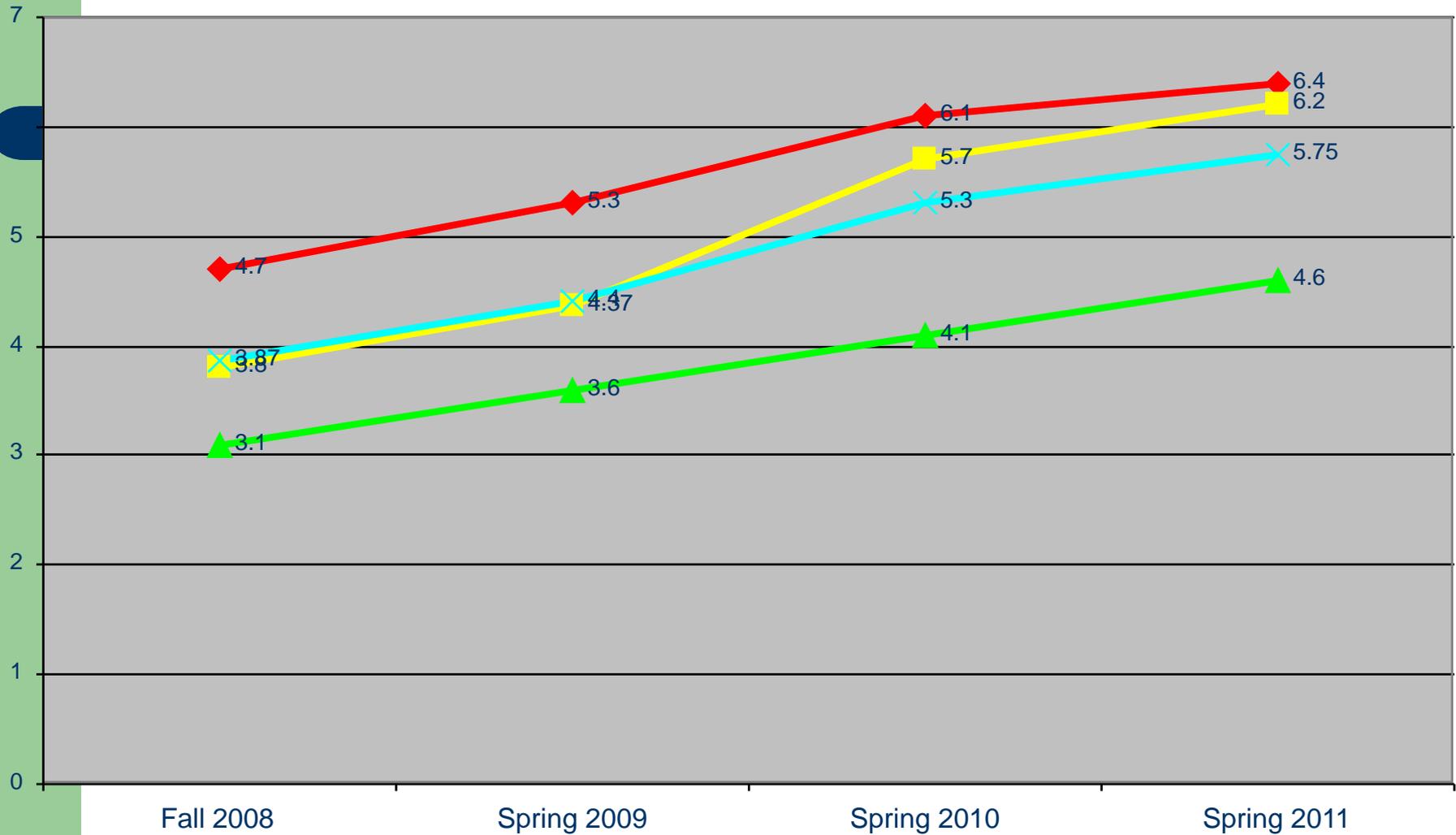


## ELLCO Score Summary



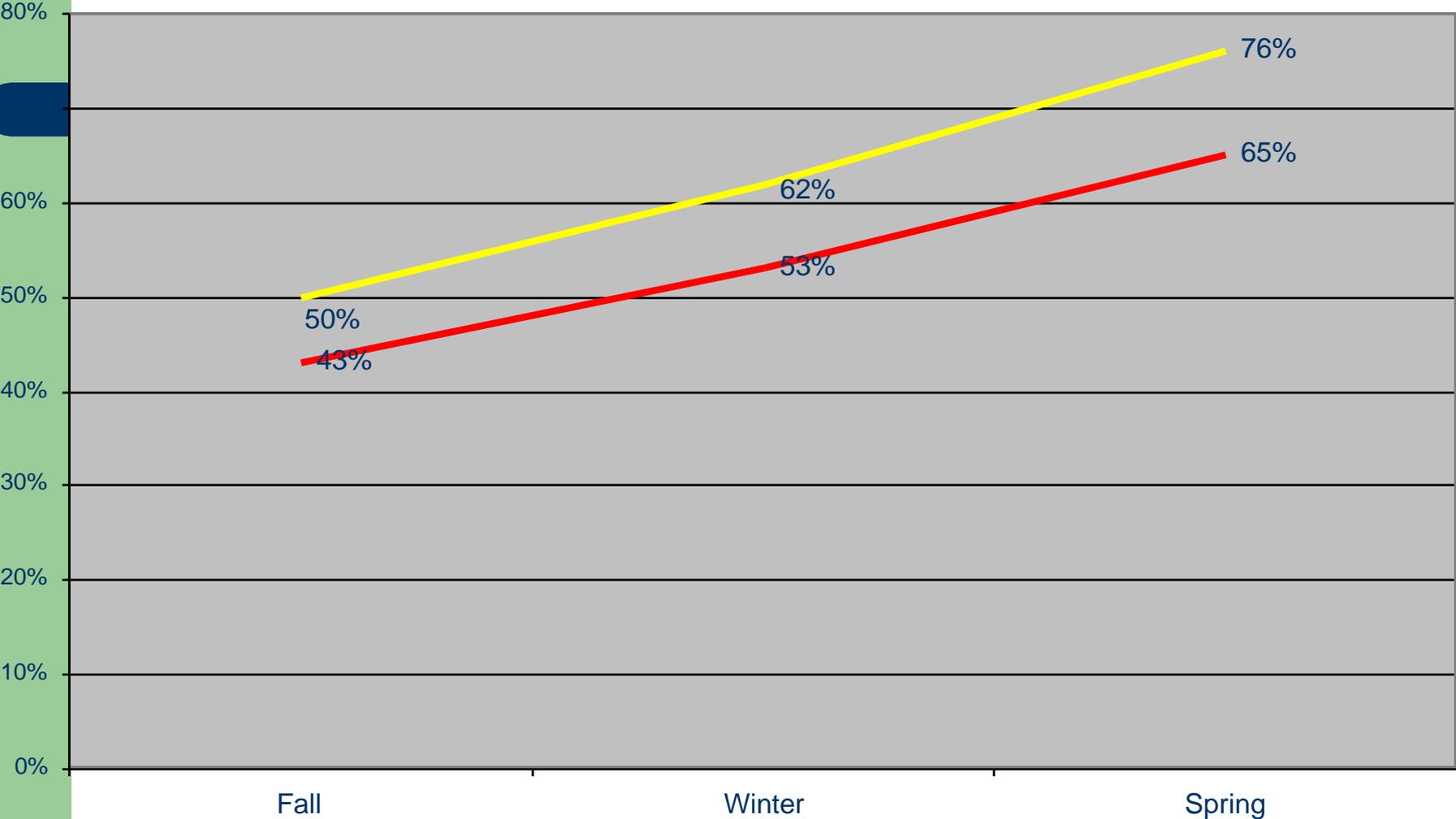
# CLASS Score Summary

—◆— Emotional Support    —■— Classroom Organization    —▲— Instructional Support    —×— Total



# Percent of Kindergarten Bound Children with Average Score or Above Average Scores on the GRTR (Present for Full Year)

All Children Children without IEPs





**Discussion & where to from here?**

# Bottom Lines for Achieving RTI

- High quality Tier 1 - Teachers have skills in:
  - DAP, Intentional Teaching across the day
  - Planning & teaching small groups
  - Using data to inform instruction
  - Using different instructional strategies for specific purposes
  - Achieving fidelity to Tier 1 curriculum
- High quality Tiers 2 and 3
  - Time and appropriate staffing to implement more intensive small groups
  - Tiers 2 and 3 used with fidelity

# Administrative Support

- System to support its use
  - knowledge, decision-making structure, policies, time, integrating assessment into program structure
- Ongoing professional development
  - for teachers and staff for all tiers
- Define the roles of staff and families
  - special and general educators, therapists, etc.
- Define purpose of Tiers 2 and 3

# Future Directions

- Practice

- Development of curricula, assessments, formats, decision-making frameworks to achieve Tier 2 and 3 with fidelity
- Implementation in community programs
- Expand to other domains, skills

# Future Directions

- Research
  - Studies to support the above – development and scaling up
- Policy
  - Caution re expectations for RTI
  - Accept alternative approaches that meet stated minimum criteria for RTI
  - Support to achieve fidelity to RTI models
  - Integration of RTI with other decision-making frameworks