

Teacher Advancement Program

The Committee’s recommendations in the Teaching and Leadership chapter mirror the theory behind the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) operated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. TAP brings together four key strategies to treat and support teachers as professionals, so that they can be more successful in practice.

This compelling model has been adopted and tailored to meet the unique needs of over 180 schools and is still growing in 14 states and the District of Columbia. In the 2007–08 school year, TAP operated in 152 traditional schools, 19 charter schools, and 13 private schools. While the TAP model has a framework for implementation that is based on sound research, it also provides the flexibility to be adjusted to meet local needs. Teachers are active participants in the development process and are influential in shaping the program; in fact, because their buy-in is critical to success, in most TAP schools the teachers voted on whether to implement the program.¹

The TAP model leverages several strategies that research suggests can support and improve the quality of teaching. While the research findings for each of the four components — multiple career paths, professional development, evaluation, and performance-based compensation — are promising when considered individually, they are somewhat mixed. What makes TAP distinct and effective is that it integrates these components into a holistic approach so that teachers practice their craft as professionals.

The TAP model has four interdependent components:

- **Multiple career paths.** The TAP model addresses constraints to teachers’ advancement by allowing teachers to pursue a variety of positions throughout their career — as career teachers, mentor teachers, and master teachers. All those who demonstrate effectiveness and have the interest in doing so have access to pursue these career opportunities.

TAP master and mentor teachers are selected through a rigorous, multifaceted, performance-based selection process, and they partner with school administrators to assume important leadership roles within the school. Their increased authority brings with it new responsibilities, which, in turn, are rewarded with additional compensation and typically with extended-year contracts.

- **Ongoing, applied professional growth.** TAP schools are strongly committed to effective professional development for all teachers. Teachers and administrators in TAP schools can review the school’s learning goals and use student results and evaluation data to tailor training to meet the individual needs of teachers. Additionally, teachers develop individualized plans to help guide their professional growth throughout the school year.

The schedule at a TAP school is structured to allow teachers to meet, learn, plan, mentor, and work collaboratively on a weekly basis. This collaborative time allows teachers to learn from one another in ways that improve their teaching, align the school objectives more effectively, and positively impact students’ academic achievement.

The TAP model capitalizes on what works in professional development. While the breadth of research on K–12 professional development paints a mixed picture, on closer inspection, some successful strategies support student achievement. In a recent article, Heather Hill found that the most successful professional development models are structured similarly to the TAP approach: They provide adequate time for teachers to plan and work together; they present targeted information that meets identified needs; and they are relevant to and aligned with district and school learning goals and curricular materials.²

To ensure that professional development and collaboration time are effective, TAP schools come full circle and measure whether or not the new strategies being implemented actually help students meet the set learning goals.

- **Instructionally focused evaluation and accountability.** Every teacher in a TAP school is evaluated four to six times annually by master or mentor teachers and the school’s principal. Evaluations follow a standard framework associated with the TAP program, but some flexibility also is provided to allow teachers to help shape the implementation of the evaluation process at the school level. This combination of program standards and local flexibility helps to ensure that teachers view the professional evaluation standards as fair and reasonable. In addition, all evaluators receive extensive training pursuant to TAP standards and are certified so that the results are consistent no matter who is conducting the evaluation. This ensures that the evaluations are consistently administered and that the findings are valid and reliable. Evaluations help to identify relevant training opportunities to promote each teacher’s skills, as well as to determine additional rewards. Within the accountability framework, evaluations are based on three components:
 - *Professional standards.* The first component of a TAP evaluation is the application of a set of professional standards that are essential to the TAP model. TAP’s “Teaching Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibility Standards” are divided into four primary domains: Designing and Planning Instruction; Instruction; The Learning Environment; and Responsibilities. While TAP defines the first three domains, the details of the fourth domain, Responsibilities, are left to each school to develop based on the local expectations for the teachers. Here again, TAP is informed by research: The Consortium for Policy Research in Education recently found “that the scores from standards-based performance evaluation systems can have a substantial positive relationship with student achievement and that the instructional practices measured by these systems contribute to student learning.”³
 - *Classroom achievement.* The second component of the evaluation is focused directly on student achievement. TAP uses a value-added model to calculate the academic achievement growth of students in a teacher’s classroom over time. This calculation uses pre- and post-program testing to compare the difference between the actual average student score in a teacher’s classroom and the expected average score for those students. Teachers are thereby evaluated on the impact they have had on their students during the year. Multiple indicators of performance that include statewide achievement goals, not just state assessments, are used to determine achievement.
 - *Schoolwide achievement.* Because the TAP model focuses on collaboration and teamwork among the participating school’s teachers, the professional evaluation incorporates the growth of ALL students in the school. This third component of the professional evaluation uses the same value-added approach as the classroom achievement component.
- **Performance-based compensation.** The final component of TAP is performance-based compensation, developed and implemented locally in consultation with teachers. TAP schools reward teachers according to their roles and responsibilities, as well as for the achievement gains of their own and all school students. Master and mentor teachers take on more responsibility and authority and, to carry out their non-teaching roles, tend to work a longer school year than the typical classroom teacher. Their salaries are augmented — on average, \$9,000 for master teachers and \$4,000 for mentor teachers — to compensate them for the increased demands of their positions. In addition, all teachers are eligible for financial rewards based on the results of their evaluations; in calculating those awards, all three components of the evaluation process are incorporated. The TAP approach also provides relevant, timely support through professional development,

coaching, and team teaching so that teachers have every opportunity to receive the financial incentives available. Finally, there are no caps on the number of teachers in a school who can receive the incentives.

In addition to incentives based on student achievement, the TAP system also supports districts in offering competitive salaries to those who teach in “hard-to-staff” schools and subjects, such as math, science, and special education. Similar to the other salary augmentations, these incentives are tied to the evaluation process so that *effective* teachers who teach in these schools and subject areas are paid more than teachers in less-challenging environments.

The manner in which these four strategies build on and reinforce one another to improve teaching effectiveness makes TAP’s comprehensive approach particularly productive. In 2004, the Teaching Commission, a diverse group of leaders in government, business, and education, reached consensus and made recommendations that included all four components of TAP.⁴ In 2007, the Working Group on Teacher Quality, coordinated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, endorsed a compensation reform model that mirrors TAP’s holistic approach.⁵ And a draft report by *Education Sector*, which was due in January 2008, highlights TAP as a model of integrated teacher evaluation, development, and compensation.⁶

Educators, Unions, Districts, and States Join To Implement TAP

Union Leaders Helped Spearhead TAP in Minneapolis, MN, and Columbus, OH

Collaboration among educators, unions, districts, and state education departments is critical to the success and sustainability of TAP. These key stakeholders are actively involved in the program’s development at the outset and, as a result, are well-prepared for its implementation. In addition, TAP typically requires a local teacher vote to implement the program in a school.

The need to improve student achievement growth, coupled with TAP’s comprehensive, research-based design, drove union leaders in the diverse urban areas of Minneapolis and Columbus to help spearhead TAP in their districts.

Minneapolis

When TAP was first proposed by the Minnesota Department of Education, one of the state’s local affiliates of the American Federation of Teachers — the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers — given its long history of studying performance pay, decided to explore the program as the final piece of its professional model. After conducting its own research, the union presented the TAP plan to union stewards, teacher leaders, and principals.

As a result, three schools started implementing TAP in the 2004–05 year and made tremendous progress. At Andersen Open Elementary, which received a 92 percent teacher vote in favor of TAP, the number of students scoring proficient on the Basic Skills Test soared from 39 to 62 percent in reading and from 29 to 39 percent in math — after just one year of implementing TAP.

The state took notice of Minneapolis’s success with TAP and wanted to expand the model statewide. The state legislature and governor enacted Q Comp. Q Comp combines career advancement, professional development, and a restructured compensation system linked to academic achievement, along with a locally agreed-upon peer observation process for every teacher that is based on skills, responsibilities, and student academic growth. As of summer 2007, 37 districts and 14 charter schools had joined the Q Comp program, with additional districts expressing interest.

Columbus

When the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) introduced TAP to the Columbus Public Schools, where more than 73 percent of the students are economically disadvantaged, the ODE, the district, and the Columbus Education Association — a National Education Association affiliate — worked together to discuss the program with teachers and administrators. Union president Rhonda Johnson was active in every step of TAP's development and regularly visited TAP schools to monitor their progress.

The hard work and preparation paid off. After just one year of TAP, South High School's state rating jumped from "Academic Watch" to "Continuous Improvement" for the 2005–06 year. Moreover, South High outperformed similar non-TAP high schools in student achievement gains. On the Ohio Graduation Test, the number of South students scoring proficient or above increased by 1.5 percentage points in reading; but in similar non-TAP high schools, the percentage declined by an average of 12 points. In math, South's percent of proficient or above students increased by 9.7 percentage points, whereas similar non-TAP high schools, on average, made no gains.

School year 2006–07 results show an even bigger leap in school ratings by Easthaven Elementary — from the lowest rating of "Academic Emergency" to "Continuous Improvement" — after its first TAP year.

"There are things happening at TAP schools that should be happening at all schools," Johnson said.

The tremendous academic improvement in Columbus spurred the expansion of TAP not only in Columbus, but also to Cincinnati, where union collaboration is similarly strong. ODE qualified for a \$20 million federal Teacher Incentive Fund, of which a portion will go toward TAP in these districts over the next five years.

For more information, visit the Web site for the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching at www.talentedteachers.org/tap.taf?page=tapinaction.

Evaluating TAP

While research indicates that each of the individual TAP components supports teaching and learning, it is the integrated approach that makes this model truly powerful. Early results revealed by the TAP evaluation are impressive. TAP schools outperformed their comparison schools in all six states that were reviewed, as measured by individual student achievement gains from one year to the next. In addition, almost two-thirds of the TAP teachers were able to help their students make greater gains than teachers in comparison schools. And teacher attrition at TAP schools has been reduced: For example, in Bell Street Middle School, in Clinton, SC, turnover rates that previously ranged 30–40 percent each year have consistently been less than 10 percent since the third year of TAP implementation.⁷

TAP's program evaluation also included a survey of TAP teachers and compared their responses to other national teacher surveys. The findings indicate that "TAP teachers support the four elements of TAP, and their support grows the longer they are in the program ... TAP teachers found their professional development to be more useful in improving their effectiveness in the classroom than teachers nationwide ... [and] Performance pay has neither led to competition nor susceptibility to principal bias in TAP schools."⁸ Some 70 percent of teachers participating in TAP reported "high levels of collegiality" at their schools.

Finally, many factors affect how much it costs to implement TAP in a given school. For example, the total number of master and mentor teachers and the amount of their salary augmentation factors into the cost. Other variable costs include additional planning time, training, and the amount allotted for performance pay. Schools have used various sources to fund TAP, including

state legislative funds, voter initiatives, reallocation of district funds, and partnerships with foundations. In addition, several federal funding sources under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law can and have been used to support the implementation of TAP, including Title I (Parts A, B, F), Title II, Title V, and Title VI; and eight of the 34 awards granted through the federal Teacher Incentive Fund are being used for TAP.

The TAP model uses a variety of research-based strategies in a holistic approach to improve student achievement. It fosters a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement by supporting teacher needs and providing opportunities for each teacher to succeed and then rewarding that success. Through this approach, teachers can excel in their profession, and students benefit.

Endnotes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, information in this appendix came from conversations with TAP staff.

² Hill, Heather (2007). "Learning in the Teaching Workforce," *Excellence in the Classroom*, The Future of Children, Princeton-Brookings (www.futureofchildren.org).

³ Heneman, Herbert, III, Anthony Milanowski, Steven Kimball, and Allan Odden (2005) *Standards-Based Teacher Evaluation as a Foundation for Knowledge- and Skill-Based Pay*, Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Policy Briefs, RB-45, p. 5.

⁴ The Teaching Commission (2004) *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action* (<http://ftp.ets.org/pub/corp/ttcreport.pdf>).

⁵ National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (2007) *Creating a Successful Performance Compensation System for Educators* (www.talentedteachers.org/pubs/successful_performance_pay_july_2007.pdf).

⁶ Toch, Thomas, and Robert Reichman, "Rush to Judgment: Teacher Evaluation in Public Education," *Education Sector*, 2008 (www.educationsector.org/usr_doc/RushToJudgment_ES_Jan08.pdf).

⁷ Solmon, Lewis, J. Todd White, Donna Cohen, and Deborah Woo (2007) *The Effectiveness of the Teacher Advancement Project*, National Institute for Effectiveness in Teaching (www.talentedteachers.org).

⁸ *Ibid.* (2007), p. 32.