



Center for
Educator Compensation
Reform

Case Summary

*TAP: The System for Teacher
and Student Advancement*



TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement

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Introduction

TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement is one of the best-known examples of a comprehensive, systemic approach to improving teacher quality. TAP seeks to improve student achievement by attracting talented individuals to the teaching profession and retaining effective educators through opportunities for enhanced compensation, professional growth, and advancement.

In its 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, The National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended that teacher salaries be more professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based. As the commission released this seminal report, alternative compensation programs began to emerge. These early “merit pay” programs primarily focused on principal evaluations and additional pay based on student test scores or market factors (e.g., teaching in hard-to-staff schools or subject areas) (Rowland & Potemski, 2009). Recognizing the limitations of these early, single-track merit pay programs, Lowell Milken, chairman of the Milken Family Foundation—noted for its national Milken Educator Awards program—introduced TAP in 1999 as a more balanced and comprehensive approach to performance-based compensation,

The Milken Family Foundation believed that public school improvement required more than just a change in the way that schools pay teachers. Foundation members spent several years researching reforms aimed at improving teacher quality. They subsequently concluded that proponents of these reforms took a piecemeal approach to implementation and focused on just one element of teacher quality, compensation, without attending to other elements, such as recruitment, induction, professional development, or evaluation (T. Schiff, personal communication, April 30, 2009). Milken and his colleagues thought that a more complete approach to improving teacher effectiveness was necessary.

Consequently, the Milken Family Foundation designed TAP as a multi-component strategy to attract, retain, develop, and motivate talented teachers. The strategy incorporates three components in addition to performance-based compensation: a career ladder, individualized and applied professional development, and instructionally focused accountability.

As TAP implementation grew, Milken and his colleagues concluded that a nonprofit, public organization would likely have more influence than a family foundation on national policy related to teacher quality. In addition, the Milken Family Foundation recognized growing needs

for external partnerships to help advance the reform system as well as a dedicated source of guidance and assistance for the schools and districts that were beginning to implement TAP. In 2005, the foundation created the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) to manage TAP operations and provide oversight. The foundation appointed Lowell Milken as NIET founder and chair (T. Schiff, personal communication, April 30, 2009). As of the 2009–10 school year, TAP serves 7,500 teachers and 85,000 students throughout the United States (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2009c).

This CECR case summary details the development and implementation of TAP as a systemic reform to enhance teacher quality through differentiated compensation, professional development, career opportunities, and accountability. CECR staff consulted and compiled information from the following sources to develop this case summary:

- TAP website (www.tapsystem.org)
- Research reports on TAP
- Interviews with the following individuals:
 - Tamara Schiff, Ph.D., Senior Vice President of NIET
 - Kristan Van Hook, Senior Vice President of Public Policy and Development for NIET
 - Tammy Kreuz, Ph.D., State Director of Texas TAP
 - Jason Culbertson, Former State Director of South Carolina TAP
 - Sheila Talamo, State Director of Louisiana TAP
 - MaryKate Hughes, TAP Master Teacher at DC Prep

Case Summary at a Glance

- TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement is a national education reform initiative started by the Milken Family Foundation in 1999 and currently administered by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET).
- TAP includes four interrelated key components: multiple career paths, ongoing applied professional growth, instructionally focused accountability, and performance-based compensation.
- The structured yet flexible nature of TAP allows for schools and districts to exercise site-based autonomy in customizing the details of the components to best meet their needs.
- Lessons learned from TAP speak to the need to implement comprehensive reform, broker communication between school officials and teachers, and increase teacher buy-in.

Initial Development of TAP

Lowell Milken and his colleagues at the Milken Family Foundation—who included award-winning educators, education researchers, and individuals from the business sector—began development of what would become TAP by conducting research on teacher quality issues. Expanding on the belief that teachers are the most influential school-day factor affecting student achievement, they conducted an extensive review of the school reform literature to identify the characteristics of successful reforms and to incorporate these factors into TAP’s structure. In addition, the foundation conducted numerous focus groups to obtain feedback on proposed system components, including teacher evaluation rubrics and bonus structures. Focus group participants included veteran teachers, new teachers, award-winning teachers, distinguished principals and administrators, parents, and individuals from the business community (T. Schiff, personal communication, April 30, 2009).

Throughout the mid- and late 1990s, as the foundation began to build the TAP model, teacher compensation reform again moved to the forefront of education policy. In his influential 1992 publication, *Rethinking School Finance: An Agenda for the 1990s*, education researcher Allan Odden explains that an interrelated series of financial drivers (e.g., cost-effectiveness in school reform, site-based budgeting, and new accountability systems) cause stakeholders at every level of education policymaking to acknowledge that innovative models for paying teachers are necessary. Using research like Odden’s and information gathered from their focus groups, Milken and his colleagues also came to understand that reforms—especially compensation reforms—that did not include systems for developing and retaining highly effective teachers would not be effective. The foundation maintained that a systemic, comprehensive

approach to improving teacher quality was necessary. Such an approach would include effective mechanisms for teacher professional growth, support, and accountability, along with a system for paying teachers for their performance (T. Schiff, personal communication, April 30, 2009).

In his keynote address at the 1999 Milken National Education Conference, Lowell Milken introduced TAP as an opportunity to improve teacher quality. After the address, chief state school officers from Arizona, Arkansas, and South Carolina approached Milken to express their interest in TAP (T. Schiff, personal communication, September 14, 2009). The Milken Family Foundation worked with department of education leadership from each of these three states to facilitate meetings and provide more detailed background information on TAP implementation. The states then invited innovative, reform-minded districts to bring district and school teams to learn more about TAP. During these meetings, foundation staff provided documents outlining the criteria to become a TAP school.¹ For example, a school must adhere to the following criteria:

- Have enough teachers to fill TAP’s required ratios of master-to-career teachers and mentor-to-career teachers.
- Establish a way to provide teachers one to two hours of pupil-free time per week for mentors to fulfill their responsibilities.
- Have a scaled, vertically aligned testing program in place for all students.

School representatives who attended these meetings presented TAP information and criteria to their respective faculties to determine the level of staff buy-in and whether or not the schools met all of TAP’s baseline criteria. Foundation staff were available for further

¹ These documents were the precursor to what is now the TAP Implementation Manual (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2009d).

consultation if needed and, in a few cases, presented additional information to smaller groups before the schools and districts decided to implement TAP (T. Schiff, personal communication, September 14, 2009).

During the past decade, the TAP program continued to expand. Currently, there are TAP schools in 13 states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas) and the District of Columbia. Of those 13 states, four have state-level TAP offices with an executive director and full staff; local TAP leadership exists in most of the other locations. Generally, when a state or district has between eight and 10 TAP schools, it hires a TAP director, and NIET provides training and support to that individual. For those states with fewer than eight TAP schools, NIET has developed a set of management strategies, discussed later in this case summary, to guide their work.

TAP System Design

The TAP program consists of four interrelated, key components (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2009b; Sawchuk, 2009; Springer, Ballou, & Peng, 2008):

- **Multiple Career Paths.** This component offers teachers professional growth opportunities with increasing compensation. States or districts hire teachers on a competitive basis as career teachers, mentor teachers, or master teachers. Career teachers are full-time classroom teachers; mentor teachers teach full-time but also help spearhead professional development; and master teachers lead professional development activities, conduct teacher evaluation observations, model best practices, and co-teach. Each participating school has a TAP school leadership team comprising mentor and master teachers, assistant principals, and principals.

- **Ongoing Applied Professional Growth.** TAP encourages ongoing professional development by providing teachers collaborative time during which they meet as “cluster groups” to develop and implement new instructional practices and curricula focused on increasing student learning. Mentor and master teachers facilitate this collaboration and conduct multiple classroom observations of each teacher during the course of a school year. Professional development continues in the classroom as master teachers observe instruction, team teach, or model best instructional practice.
- **Instructionally Focused Accountability.** This component consists of a comprehensive teacher evaluation system that rewards teachers for their instructional performance, including meeting the *TAP Teaching Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibility Standards* as well as for their students’ academic growth. TAP school leadership team members conduct evaluations using TAP instructional rubrics, which rate teachers on a continuum of growth in various areas (e.g., delivery of content and providing academic feedback to students).
- **Performance-Based Compensation.** TAP provides pay bonuses to teachers based on three criteria: teacher performance according to TAP instructional measures; student academic growth across the entire school; and each teacher’s individual contribution to classroom-level growth. Regarding the performance of teachers who teach subjects for which there are no standardized assessments, TAP leans more heavily on schoolwide growth. Depending on a school’s needs, TAP administrators can adjust the weight placed on each of the three compensation criteria as appropriate.

Because of the controversial nature of rewarding teachers based on student performance, the fourth

component, performance-based compensation, often draws the bulk of initial attention from schools and districts considering participation in TAP. However, TAP does not promote one component over the others, instead recognizing that they are all essential for improving teacher quality. In fact, TAP requires sites to implement all four of the system components. In addition, TAP recognizes that each school has its own dynamics and needs and, therefore, considers local circumstances and allows for appropriate adjustments to implementation. For example, TAP will not allow for fewer than three annual evaluations for each teacher within a TAP school. However, the ratio of master and mentor teachers to career teachers is negotiable in cases in which a school does not have a large enough faculty to meet the ratio requirement (T. Schiff, personal communication, April 30, 2009; September 14, 2009). In support of this point, Louisiana TAP Director Sheila Talamo commented, “The four components are like a tapestry; if you pull one thread, you no longer have a picture” (personal communication, April 22, 2009). Talamo did not specify which TAP component she feels is the most important. She did indicate, however, that alternative compensation is the “reasonable conclusion” to the other parts of the system. In other words, if teachers in a given school experience success through ongoing professional development, and schools assess that success through an instructionally focused accountability system, then schools should reward those teachers accordingly.

Implementing TAP at the School Level

Staffing

In order to implement TAP, a principal must contact the district office or state department of education; NIET does not have the capacity to work with individual schools interested in TAP. Thus, TAP encourages school officials who think they may want to implement TAP to study all the

available information on the program before engaging local stakeholders. For example, the Louisiana Department of Education has created a “pre-TAP” opportunity for schools to learn more about the program before committing to implementation. The Louisiana Department of Education designates interested schools as pre-TAP and provides them the opportunity to visit TAP schools, participate in state-sponsored informational workshops, view presentations to school staff, and attend the TAP national conference. The pre-TAP experience assists schools in making a better-informed decision relative to a future TAP commitment (S. Talamo, personal communication, April 22, 2009). When an administrator decides to move forward, school faculty vote; in general, 65 to 75 percent of teachers must agree, depending on union stipulations in the particular district. This vote to implement is essential to achieving and maintaining stakeholder buy-in; those few districts that went ahead with the implementation without first educating their teachers and soliciting teacher input have “really regretted it” (K. Van Hook, personal communication, April 20, 2009).

After stakeholders decide to implement TAP, the school begins to recruit and select the master and mentor teachers who will serve on the TAP leadership team, along with the principal and other school administrators. TAP encourages schools to recruit widely but rigorously for these positions. Master and mentor teachers may come from within or from outside the school or district. TAP also requires that leadership team members complete the following three core trainings (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2009d):

- **“Preparing for Success in a TAP School”** provides specifics on TAP implementation by focusing on the skills and processes members need to conduct effective leadership team meetings, establish school goals, and implement clusters.

- **“Preparing to Become a Certified Evaluator”** provides training on leading effective pre-conferences and postconferences that accompany teacher evaluations and focuses on accurate application of the TAP teacher evaluation rubrics.
- **“Becoming a Certified TAP Evaluator”** continues the focus on accurate application of the TAP rubrics but provides more in-depth training on the elements of effective coaching. The training concludes with a certification test that all TAP leadership team members must pass before they begin to evaluate teachers in their schools.

Part of TAP’s mission is to build state and district capacity to implement and administer initiatives in their schools. In partnership with NIET, state-level TAP offices hire and train executive master teachers who support school-level activities. NIET provides technical assistance to build local capacity while maintaining quality and achieving results. In the absence of a management office in a state, the NIET national office trains leadership teams at individual sites (K. Van Hook, personal communication, April 20, 2009).

Since the initial round of implementation in Arizona, Arkansas, and South Carolina, TAP has used nearly this same process with other interested parties; however, Schiff emphasizes that the process is not “cookie-cutter”:

Whether a partnership with NIET to implement TAP is feasible is dependent upon many different circumstances, so to quantify and create a single scenario of “how it is” is a bit of a challenge. Sometimes a district may want to pilot a single school before expanding to more schools, but it just depends on the circumstances. (personal communication, April 30, 2009)

District leadership might approach a school about implementing TAP, or a principal and a group of teachers from a school might approach district leadership (T. Schiff, personal communication, October 1, 2009). In general, states with a TAP infrastructure in place work with school districts interested in implementing TAP to ensure that the criteria outlined in the TAP implementation manual are present in their schools and that funding is available so that those schools can begin creating TAP leadership teams and participating in the TAP core trainings. Individual schools interested in TAP also can implement the system if they have district leadership support. TAP emphasizes that interested states and districts should begin the process by spring of the school year prior to TAP implementation to allow adequate time to establish leadership teams and begin principal participation in core training (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2009d).

Implementing and Measuring the Four Components

Because the four components of TAP are the foundation of its structure, only limited variation in implementation exists across the states and districts. Although NIET makes recommendations about the specific details of these four components, those doing the work maintain control over the design of the system’s parts. TAP is rigid enough to provide a sound framework for reform, but, within that structure, state, district, and school officials can adapt the four components to meet their specific needs. For instance, for the fourth component, NIET suggests the following breakdown of weights for performance bonuses:

- Teacher evaluations based on the *TAP Teaching Skills, Knowledge and Responsibilities Performance Standards* (50 percent)

- Individual classroom achievement growth (30 percent)
- Schoolwide achievement growth (20 percent)

As noted previously, these are recommendations and not mandates. In some districts, administrators postpone performance bonuses until the second year of implementation because they can be controversial and require substantial faculty buy-in. At DC Prep, for example, administrators held off on the performance bonuses (although DC Prep paid master and mentor teacher stipends) until the second year of TAP implementation. MaryKate Hughes, a master teacher at DC Prep, confirmed that this decision was borne out of caution. “Studying the goal and offering the reward is not enough,” she explains (personal communication, April 27, 2009). Districts must base bonuses on valid and reliable measures of success in order for teachers to feel adequately compensated. Until leaders at DC Prep felt that they could adequately measure value-added growth at the school, they chose to hold off on the bonuses. This kind of site-based autonomy helps schools and districts across the country gradually implement the TAP model in their own contexts.

To measure student achievement growth, TAP has developed a value-added model to analyze student and teacher performance at the district, school, and classroom levels (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2009a). Because TAP does not mandate how value-added results should be calculated, each TAP school works with a value-added “vendor”—an independent consultant, an organization such as SAS EVASS for K–12 (SAS Institute, n.d.), or an internal researcher—who has developed value-added methodologies for the TAP schools or districts with which it works. These value-added vendors also help TAP schools and districts build their capacity to use value-added data to evaluate student achievement levels across schools, grades, and even content areas. These data have the potential to help district officials in several ways, from planning targeted professional

development for teachers and schools to identifying teachers and administrators with strong records of accomplishment to serve in TAP leadership positions (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2009e).

At the school level, TAP leadership teams use value-added data to address the instructional needs of teachers both at the individual and group levels. By analyzing teacher value-added scores and comparing them to a teacher’s evaluation scores (based on observations of classroom instruction), leadership teams are able to identify teaching practices and strategies that have a positive impact on student achievement. Master teachers field-test student strategies to teach to other teachers during weekly cluster group meetings (professional learning communities) to promote effective instruction. TAP teachers also use other classroom assessments to identify student needs in order to inform professional development activities. In addition, leadership team members use comparative data to confer with teachers on a one-on-one basis and inform the development of teachers’ individual professional growth plans to reach instructional goals (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2009e).

At the classroom level, teachers analyze the value-added data from their own students by subgroups (such as high-, medium-, and low-performing students) to identify trends in their instruction. The data may reveal that teachers target their instruction to a specific subgroup, and, as a result, teachers make adjustments. This data analysis process allows teachers to meet the needs of all students more effectively and support the individual academic growth of their students regardless of their ability level (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2009e).

Funding

NIET staff estimate that the cost of implementing TAP in a school is \$250–\$400 per student per year, depending on factors such as enrollment and

number of faculty members. Under the current implementation strategy, as outlined in *Understanding the Teacher Advancement Program*, teacher salaries should not decrease because of fund reallocation; rather, the salaries of master and mentor teachers increase based on their increased roles and responsibilities, with money allocated to award performance-based bonuses (Teacher Advancement Program Foundation, n.d.). In addition to funds they can reallocate to support TAP implementation, school officials often seek supplemental financial support from the following sources:

- State-legislated funds
- Modified state regulations that enable schools to access existing funds for TAP use
- Voter initiatives
- State education agency (SEA) funds
- Partnerships with foundations
- Federal funds, such as the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF)

NIET encourages school and district officials to be thoughtful and strategic about seeking sources of supplemental funding, as there are many latent costs associated with the implementation of a system such as TAP. In addition to the obvious costs, such as salary augmentations, training, and performance awards, administrators must think about the costs associated with release time for mentor teachers, professional development meeting time, additional testing (where necessary), and value-added calculations. Due to the change in funding scheme that a school often undergoes in order to launch TAP, administrators sometimes choose to deal with the nonincentive costs first, only introducing performance awards during the second implementation year after the model is up and running. For example, administrators at DC Prep implemented

this strategy (M. Hughes, personal communication, April 27, 2009). Though most districts do not enact this strategy, some districts require this flexibility in order to implement TAP.

School districts, SEAs and nonprofit organizations are now more interested in TAP than previously because of the TIF program (T. Schiff, personal communication, September 14, 2009). For example, in 2007, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), in collaboration with NIET, proposed the Recognizing Excellence in Academic Leadership (REAL) program, which became the current Chicago TAP. A TIF grant is the primary source of funds for the Chicago TAP program (Ann Chan, personal communication, September 15, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Factors Contributing to Successful Implementation of TAP

Because TAP is a comprehensive system of reform, successful implementation requires diligent attention to an array of components, each contributing individually to a positive outcome. The following sections describe several of these components.

Strong Professional Development

TAP supports strong professional development focused on improving communication among school staff. Internal TAP survey data show that TAP teachers report high levels of collegiality and that collegiality increases as years of implementation progress, which NIET officials attribute to a strong professional development system (T. Schiff, personal communication, April 30, 2009). TAP's 2008 annual principal survey reveals similar findings: 93 percent agreed with the statement, "TAP professional growth activities lead to collegiality among my teachers" (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, in press).

Similarly, a NIET 2007 evaluation comparing the amount of support and collaboration TAP teachers experience to that which public school teachers experience found a marked difference (as cited in Solmon, White, Cohen, & Woo, 2007). Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2000 national teacher survey, 57 percent of TAP teachers agreed or very much agreed that they were becoming better teachers because of support and collaboration and further attributed those gains to the professional development they received at their schools. Thirty-one percent of TAP teachers responding to the NCES survey said that they participated in collaborative meetings with other teachers at least once per week, and 24 percent stated that these meetings improved their teaching significantly (as cited in Solmon et al., 2007). In addition, the Chicago Teachers Union cites TAP's emphasis on teacher growth (along with its flexibility regarding pay) as helpful in lessening concerns about the performance-pay component (Sawchuk, 2009).

The NIET evaluation also found that performance pay has not led to overwhelming perceptions of competition in TAP schools, though some respondents did express these feelings. Only 38 percent of TAP teachers agreed or very much agreed that performance-based compensation programs encourage competition rather than collaboration among teachers. Likewise, only one-third of TAP teachers agreed or very much agreed that TAP's compensation component reduces the sense of community among teachers at their schools (Solmon et al., 2007).

Teacher-Centered Reform

TAP also has garnered interest and support from educators and teachers unions because of its emphasis on obtaining teacher approval prior to implementing the reform. The requirement to bring all

stakeholders to the table to learn about TAP and agree on implementation has been a key factor in the success of the system (T. Schiff, personal communication, April 30, 2009). Some TAP schools and districts have codified the teacher buy-in component of TAP. For example, CPS established a legal agreement with its teachers union to ensure that it confirms teacher buy-in before TAP implementation (Sawchuk, 2009). Dr. Tammy Kreuz indicated that TAP's emphasis on teacher buy-in and the four-component approach has helped promote its acceptance among Texas educators. In addition, she noted that school superintendents initially focused on the pay-for-performance component, but when they saw how the four components worked together, they were more accepting of TAP (personal communication, April 29, 2009).

Teacher Accountability and Supportive Feedback

Classroom observers visit teachers in TAP schools at least four times during the school year, providing constructive feedback on classroom performance. Master teachers and the principal can compare evaluations for each teacher via a data management system to provide inter-rater reliability as well as to identify areas in which a specific teacher needs the most support (Springer, Ballou, & Peng, 2008). Continuous performance feedback helps struggling teachers feel supported, rather than punished, by the evaluation process (Sawchuk, 2009).

Dr. Kreuz added that TAP's instructionally focused accountability appeals to teachers in her state, and she has seen marked improvement in teacher retention rates since implementation. One school's retention rate jumped from 33 to 55 percent, then 92 percent after the second year (T. Kreuz, personal communication, April 29, 2009).

Impact on Teacher Retention

Many participating principals believe that TAP's overall design helps them retain effective teachers and weed out those who are less effective. Sixty-six percent of TAP principals agreed that TAP has helped retain effective teachers, and 53 percent agree that the system is a reason that some ineffective teachers have left their schools. Similarly, 50 percent of these principals agreed that TAP has made it easier to hire high-quality teachers. Chicago TAP schools also saw increased retention after the first year of implementation, up five percentage points from the previous year (88 versus 83 percent) (Glazerman, McKie, & Carey, 2009). Fifty-one percent of TAP principals who responded to the NIET evaluation agreed that TAP has discouraged some teachers from applying to their schools, but the evaluation does not elaborate on whether these teachers were desirable or undesirable candidates (Solmon et al., 2007). Other TAP schools throughout the United States reported a small degree of attrition in the first year of implementation because some teachers are not willing to open their classrooms for the regular observation that TAP requires (Sawchuk, 2009).

Union Compliance

In areas of the country where unions and teacher associations are strong, union officials often design and negotiate teacher contracts. Because the TAP system has a model of differentiated staffing, master and mentor teachers often have both standard teacher contracts as well as supplemental contracts that clearly specify their additional roles and pay. In order to attract union leaders to a system like TAP, district and school officials must work to create high quality, job-embedded professional development through the cluster groups. When officials genuinely have used cluster groups to promote professional learning communities and performance awards that are not

punitive, union leaders have often supported these reforms. For example, districts and schools implemented TAP in partnership with teacher unions in Chicago, Illinois; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Columbus, Ohio; and Knox County, Tennessee.

Measuring Success

Research and evaluation on TAP is limited, but NIET and TAP regularly conduct internal analysis. TAP's measurement system includes surveys of teacher and principal attitudes, retention and turnover data from principals, and school-level value-added results. TAP has worked with external evaluators to conduct program evaluations, and it continues to develop its own research agenda (T. Schiff, personal communication, April 30, 2009).

A 2007 NIET evaluation of TAP that analyzed 2004–05 student achievement gains to compare teachers and schools showed that TAP teachers produce higher student achievement growth than comparable non-TAP teachers. Similarly, more TAP schools outperformed comparable non-TAP schools in producing an average year of growth or more in both reading and mathematics achievement (Solmon et al., 2007). In contrast, a 2009 Mathematica evaluation of TAP in Chicago found no measurable impact on student test scores as of March of the 2007–08 school year, the first year of implementation (Glazerman et al., 2009).

Lessons Learned

Piecemeal teacher quality reform is not effective. TAP's four-component approach is a systemic reform model that addresses multiple aspects of teacher quality, including professional support and feedback via regular, substantive teacher evaluations. Louisiana TAP Director Sheila Talamo believes that the interrelation of the four key components has made TAP successful. According to Talamo, the components complement each other to create an

entire reform system that provides powerful and sustained means for teachers and students to excel (personal communication, April 22, 2009).

Communication and building support are critical.

To achieve the necessary faculty buy-in for implementing TAP, principals and district officials must be transparent and forthcoming with information. The requirement that a high percentage of teachers endorse TAP prior to adoption has resulted in extensive information sharing between administrators and their staff and a willingness to answer questions and address ongoing concerns. At the school level, MaryKate Hughes is confident that the improved assessment rubrics will help bolster the justification for performance pay; contribute to higher quality teaching and learning; and, ultimately, positively affect student achievement (personal communication, April 27, 2009).

Reform success depends on teacher buy-in and strong professional support. The success of any teacher-focused reform depends not only on teacher buy-in but also on sustained professional development through which teachers gain deep knowledge and a sense of ownership of the reform (Coburn, 2003). Teacher leaders, principals, and district and union officials must support implementing a new system such as TAP. As mentioned previously, TAP's required teacher buy-in is one reason for its success, and its ongoing applied professional growth component fosters a sense of collegiality among teachers in participating schools. Professional support in the form of structured opportunities for teacher collaboration and information sharing, such as that which occurs in TAP cluster groups, can lead to a stronger sense of understanding and ownership of a reform. In addition, it can lead to a stronger sense of teacher efficacy, which may positively influence retention.

Leadership turnover—a persistent issue in the field of education—sometimes challenges this type of buy-in and support. Jason Culbertson, director of

school services for NIET who previously oversaw TAP in South Carolina, reported that in one particular South Carolina TAP district, the central office has seen three superintendents since the TIF grant began in the 2006–07 school year, which makes communication and consistent buy-in an issue. Districts can overcome challenges to the system that may result from high turnover, however, so long as the director strives to convince new leadership that TAP is an effective system of reform and not just “some throw-away program that will be forgotten in a year or two” (J. Culbertson, personal communication, April 24, 2009).

Conclusion

TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement is a comprehensive reform effort that is growing in popularity in states and school districts all over the country. Although it is too young a program for concrete evaluation evidence, early anecdotal evidence indicates that the program aids with working conditions and teacher effectiveness. Those involved in current iterations of TAP explain that communication and building stakeholder support are critical to the level of teacher buy-in needed for such a reform to be a success, which is on the agenda at the federal level. On March 10, 2009, while addressing the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, President Obama pointed to the South Carolina statewide TAP implementation as being an example of the federal government's “unprecedented commitment to ensure that anyone entrusted with educating our children is doing the job as well as it can be done” (Obama, 2009). This increased interest in programs such as TAP is further corroborated by the large increase in funding slated for the third round of TIF grants, scheduled to be released in early 2010.

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The primary purpose of CECR is to support Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees in their implementation efforts through provision of sustained technical assistance and development and dissemination of timely resources. CECR also is charged with raising national awareness of alternative and effective strategies for educator compensation through a newsletter, a web-based clearinghouse, and other outreach activities.

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