

TAP EDUCATORS MAKE A DISTINCT DIFFERENCE

By **Lowell Milken**, NIET Chairman and TAP Founder

Over the last three decades, I have visited thousands of classrooms and engaged in discussion with educators working in diverse communities across the nation. I have consistently seen what research and my own personal experience confirm: that the educator in the classroom is the most important school-based element in student learning growth. Thus I was encouraged when Congress created a competitive grant program in 2006 to support innovation in the systems that support educators. For while educators understand that there is much they can do as individuals to improve their practice, they also understand that collaboration and teamwork are equally important to a school district's ability to ensure that every student has an effective teacher, every year.

TAP educators are among the very first to implement new ways of supporting, developing, evaluating and promoting teaching talent. They have shown the power and potential of educators themselves to play an essential role in supporting growth and improvement in instructional expertise.

It is with great pride that I reflect on the work that TAP educators have accomplished with students, and the impact that their hard won success had on the recently enacted education law: the Every Student Succeeds Act.

The Every Student Succeeds Act makes a number of changes in education law that return significant control to states. The practical impact of these changes will only be seen as states and districts take action over the next several



Lowell Milken visits with KIPP DC Principal Jessica Cunningham



years. For example, the bill eliminates the “highly qualified teacher” requirement and empowers states to define teacher effectiveness. Title II emphasizes many of the innovative solutions that are working in TAP schools, including teacher leadership structures, school-based professional development, evaluations based on multiple measures of effectiveness and performance-based compensation as approaches that states and districts could pursue.

For the first time, the bill would authorize into law the program known since 2006 as the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF). TIF was initially created as a funding stream for states and districts to improve educator effectiveness, and has evolved over the years to reflect many of the lessons learned at TAP sites. With this new bill, TIF is now known as the *Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program*. While there are some changes, the updated program maintains key elements of the current TIF initiative. This includes new evaluation systems based on multiple measures including student learning, teacher leadership roles and responsibilities, school-based professional support aligned to evaluation results, and opportunities for performance-based compensation.

Over the last decade, many teachers and administrators have shared their direct experiences of educator effectiveness reform with policymakers in an effort to explain what works in classrooms, schools and districts. While these

reforms are complex and each district is unique, there are common structures and approaches that have been proven in TAP schools to raise teacher effectiveness and student learning growth. The power of the personal experiences told by practicing educators about their schools and students, backed up by meaningful and sustained student achievement results over time, are reflected in key aspects of the new national education law.

This federal investment is a testament to your work, impact and commitment on behalf of educators and students. Our shared belief that powerful results on the ground can impact the national education debate was proven true this past year. We hope you will take a moment to reflect on what we have been able to accomplish together.

Of course, many challenges are still ahead as states and districts determine how they will implement the law and support educator effectiveness and student learning. We will continue to expand and refine our efforts to sustain and grow reforms that ensure every student has an effective teacher, every year. I hope that the recognition of your feedback at the federal level will encourage you to actively share your experience and perspective as states and districts move forward on these issues in the coming year. 🍌