



# WHY OUR DISTRICT IS STRONGER WITH TAP PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Through the lens of Osborn Superintendent Patricia Tate and Curriculum Specialist Shannon Mann

### The Big Picture

National studies show time and again that teachers welcome professional development — and even find it one of the most valuable parts of their jobs — if it is constructive and relevant to their classrooms. Research conducted by NIET shows 99 percent of TAP System teachers see the direct impact of professional development on student learning. Ninety-eight percent report that TAP’s professional development leads to increased collegiality, contributing to overall school morale.

But the question remains: How do you get there? While many schools have some type of professional development in place, not all are created equal. The most authoritative study furnished for the Institute of Educational Sciences concludes that most of the money spent nationally on professional development is wasted.

Prominent education organizations cite similar findings when training is not appropriately linked to teacher and student needs. According to the Center for American Progress, most professional development is “thin, sporadic and of little use when it comes to improved teaching.” TNTP, formerly The New Teacher Project, made waves with *The Mirage* study, which brings to bear an alarming reality: districts spent on average \$18,000 per teacher, but these interventions did not result in significant changes in teacher practice or student outcomes.

The need for a holistic approach to preparing teachers has prompted districts to partner with NIET. TAP System professional development addresses the challenge by providing a powerful infrastructure for collaborative leadership through mentor and master teachers, a direct connection between the training and the classroom, and proper and regular follow-up.

Throughout the process, educators are given the tools to answer questions that Professor Laura Desimone at the University of Pennsylvania identified as essential to evaluating effective professional development:

1. Do all teachers experience high-quality professional development?
2. Does the professional development increase teachers’ knowledge and skills?
3. Do teachers use their knowledge and skills to implement new strategies in the classroom?
4. Do the new classroom strategies improve students’ learning?

Osborn School District No. 8 in Phoenix has put these principles into practice. The district is no stranger to professional development initiatives; it has used Collaborative Peer Teachers (CPTs) since 1993 and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) since 1998. TAP gave Osborn something different — focus.



Shannon Mann



Tate visits with Somerset Independent School District (Texas) Superintendent Saul Hinojosa at the 2015 TAP Conference

Osborn Superintendent Patricia Tate and Curriculum Specialist Shannon Mann spoke with *TAP in Focus* about how the TAP System enriches the professional development experience throughout the district. They pinpointed specific elements of TAP’s professional development that are yielding positive and sustained results in teacher retention and effectiveness as well as the ultimate goal: student achievement.

### Common language and focus: “We got glasses.”

Osborn’s CPTs played a critical role in supporting instruction and curriculum across grade levels as well as mentoring teachers on content. However, according to Tate and Mann, there wasn’t a vehicle, such as the TAP Rubric, to provide a common language on what constitutes good teaching.

“Now we leverage that common thread and are using the same words,” Tate explained. “It helps us articulate a stronger goal, one that everyone understands. Together, in a collaborative system, we redefine our understanding of every indicator

and every descriptor. We are never done with this. But having a common vocabulary will get us there.

“We saw the power of implementing TAP that first trimester. TAP is what helped us focus. It was like we got glasses. We were already seeing, but adding the glasses helped us focus. It focused the principals, the master teachers and the classroom teachers. We were already rowing the same way, but then we got into a much better rhythm.”

Mann, a former math teacher at Osborn Middle School, said that putting a “hyper-focus” on pedagogy over content was a “big shift.” The support she was accustomed to receiving — first as a Teach for America instructor and then with Osborn’s Collaborative Peer Teachers and Professional Learning Communities — was strongly based in content. They had common planning twice a week, but, described Mann, it targeted “what to teach, not how to teach.”

The shift came at an important time, in 2010, one year before Arizona’s implementation of the new college and career ready standards were underway. With the TAP Rubric, the district not only had a mechanism for developing higher order thinking skills in their students, but they, too, were learning how to think differently. To Mann, it was “the perfect marriage. We were creating complex strategies and had the vehicle to get it out to teachers.”

### Boots on the ground

With the new approach to instruction and collaboration, it was important for Tate to involve herself and the district in leadership team meetings and evaluation processes on the campuses.



*We saw the power of implementing TAP that first trimester.*



She said the significant increase in the time commitment was “huge.” She explains, “Our big investment was time: a boots on the ground, roll up our sleeves effort.”

As assistant superintendent at the time, Tate created a system of what she calls “embeddedness,” in which district-level administrators would rotate campus to campus and participate in leadership team meetings and observations. Mann is a part of this process, spending a great deal of time on site to exchange feedback with educators and ensure that the schools are on track to achieving school- and district-level goals.

Before the TAP System, Tate spent no time on embeddedness. During the first year of TAP, she dedicated 40 percent of her time to it.

“I did more observations and post conference than our principals. I think I did 65 observations,” Tate said. “That was necessary for me to get a handle on what it looks like and help other people learn it.



Osborn Middle School

I needed to know and feel the intensity of all the processes and to learn the tool with such depth in order to apply it with the greatest effect.”

In subsequent years, the commitment has dropped to a still-substantial quarter of her time.

Tate affirms that the benefits to increased teacher retention and effectiveness as well as student achievement make the investment well worth it.

- Teacher turnover after the first year of TAP was 25 percent, partly due to the new way of doing business, but also to economic struggles educators experienced. The next year, turnover decreased to almost half—14 percent—and has remained low since.
- Osborn teachers’ skills, knowledge and responsibilities scores are improving year to year. In the 2011-12 school year, 27 percent of teachers had a score greater than 3.5 on TAP’s 1-5 observation scale. In the 2013-14 school year, that number increased to nearly 40 percent.
- Since the adoption of TAP, all schools in the district have increased their student growth percentile scores, and Osborn is the only urban Phoenix district with all A- and B-rated schools.

“TAP gave us a tool. The best was already here,” said Tate. “We didn’t get new teachers; we had our teachers doing better work because they were more supported in their work. TAP helped the best come out.”

## Osborn Results

Only urban Phoenix school district will all A- and B-rated schools

A-F LETTER GRADES	2014		2013	
School Name	Total Pts	Grade	Total Pts	Grade
Encanto Elementary School	155	A	112	C
Solano Elementary School	144	A	142	A
Osborn Middle School	135	B	127	B
Clarendon Elementary School	131	B	132	B
Longview Elementary School	124	B	113	C