

# Story of Success

SOMERSET INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT | SOMERSET, TEXAS



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**S**omerset Independent School District has worked to improve student academic outcomes by increasing equitable access to effective educators. Distributed leadership and teacher leadership opportunities have created a career pathway for teachers in Somerset, increasing retention and developing the instructional skills of all teachers and leaders in the district.

Somerset, located southwest of San Antonio, serves around 4,000 students, more than 80% of whom come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Somerset began partnering with NIET in the 2010-11 school year to implement the TAP System after the district had struggled for years to meet academic achievement goals, having been identified as “academically unacceptable” and “improvement required” under state accountability systems. The TAP System was attractive to Somerset as a way to address its challenge of recruiting and retaining effective teachers and principals while making strides in student achievement.

## SOMERSET’S STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Adopting the TAP System changed how Somerset approached classroom instruction and helped the district focus on equity. School leaders began asking themselves a key question: *How can we ensure that highly effective teaching is happening across all classrooms?*

With that question in mind, Somerset principals and teacher leaders help teachers strengthen equitable practices using data and student work. Somerset adopted NIET’s *Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric*, which provides clear descriptions of strategies that improve instruction and create a positive learning environment.





## Identify Individual Student Needs

Somerset teachers analyze student work to pinpoint areas of need for specific students that, when combined with analysis of student assessment data, create a detailed picture of student needs. Teachers use student data and student work to identify needs to address during classroom instruction, as well as possible areas for supplemental support. This approach helps teachers plan lessons that enable each student to access the learning in their classroom and to identify and plan targeted supplemental services such as tutoring.

## Plan Ahead to Create Opportunities for Equitable Access

Across multiple indicators of classroom practice, educators use the rubric to identify where equity can be advanced. They analyze student needs and anticipate where individuals or groups of students might struggle. Teachers are supported to use the rubric as a coaching tool, asking questions such as: *In planning a lesson, what activities and materials do you plan to use to engage different students with different needs?*

## Use Observation and Feedback to Coach Teachers to Build Equity into Their Lessons

Next, leaders visit classrooms to observe and provide feedback for individual teachers. Leaders consider what evidence would show them that a classroom lesson was providing each student with access to grade-level learning. Leaders consider the kinds of reflective questions to ask teachers, such as: *How will you plan your questioning to engage each student? How will you create a lesson that supports students with different needs, such as those who are English Language Learners?*

Identifying how to elevate equity is a critical step in Somerset's system to grow effective teachers who can support each student to be successful. "Student success is truly tied to the quality of the teacher within the classroom," said Somerset Elementary School Principal Nieves Carrales. "At Somerset, we spend a great deal of time focusing on growing teachers, building capacity, and making sure we have instructional leaders throughout our campus because we know that, in turn, student success falls in line."

The TAP System has helped the district develop and retain effective teachers, create more equitable teaching and learning opportunities, and make strides in student achievement.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Since partnering with NIET, Somerset has seen growth in its teachers and students. In 2021, it was one of only nine districts out of the 1,200 in Texas to see academic growth during the pandemic. From 2021 to 2024, Somerset rose in the percentage of students passing state assessments in each tested subject. In 2024, Somerset also outperformed the state on the math and reading state assessments at each grade level.

Somerset is sustaining momentum and making ongoing progress. The district is committed to creating a supportive environment for students to excel and sets ambitious goals for all students. Notably, 95% of Somerset graduates were college-, career-, or military-ready in 2023. This represents a significant increase over the prior year and puts Somerset among the most successful districts in Texas in meeting this student success measure. ●



*Somerset Independent School District students operate a drone during a hands-on STEM activity.*

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**NIEVES CARRALES**

**PRINCIPAL**

**SOMERSET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, TEXAS**