

Improving Classroom Teaching and Student Learning

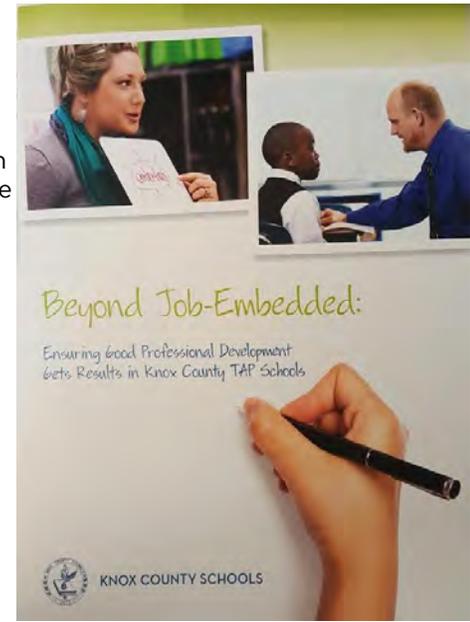
Knox County Schools (KCS) put great classroom teaching at the center of efforts to improve K-12 education, and the result was significant gains in student academic achievement in participating high need schools. KCS used a federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant to develop a comprehensive system connecting performance based evaluation for teachers and school leaders to professional learning structures, compensation and school leadership teams. Through the grant, KCS partnered with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching to use the research-based TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement. Student academic achievement increased faster than expected during the grant, and continues to trend upward for partnering schools after the end of the grant. These results indicate the structures and systems put in place based on the TAP System model are leading to improved student performance.

Making Professional Learning Effective

"Knox County Schools has made great classroom teaching a priority. This commitment is critical across all schools, and we recognize that an effective teacher can make all the difference to a student." – Administrator in Knox County Schools

The TIF funded work in 14 high need schools focused on improving teacher classroom practice, with all teachers attending 50 - 60 minute weekly "cluster" meetings led by trained master and mentor teachers. Master and mentor teachers are selected in part based on their own effective teaching practices and student achievement growth in their classrooms. They also demonstrate strong abilities to lead adult learning. During weekly cluster meetings, teacher leaders introduce a strategy, or the modification/re-teaching of one, and provide support for teachers to develop it to meet the specific needs of their students. Master and mentor teachers provide varying levels of individual follow-up support (i.e., co-teaching, model teaching, with debriefing to follow) for teachers. In turn, administrators coach master and mentor teachers weekly during leadership team meetings to ensure consistent and high quality support for the teachers they support.

The district used TIF funds to realign compensation systems to recognize and reward effectiveness, and to increase opportunities for additional compensation for teachers who successfully take on leadership roles. Principals are able to earn addendums to their base salary based on student achievement results in the school, their building level leadership score based on their state's Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards (TILS) and their leadership ability based on leadership team meeting observations scores. Teachers earn additional compensation based on the average scores on evaluations of their classroom teaching performance, their students' classroom level achievement growth, and school-level achievement growth.



Improving Support for High Need Students

KCS offers a \$3,000 recruitment and retention bonus for hard-to-staff positions, which are primarily focused at serving poor, minority, and disadvantaged students. For the first two years of implementation, these bonuses were used to support hiring in secondary schools, as the district typically has a surplus of elementary candidates. Subsequently these incentives shifted to the state-identified Focus and/or Priority schools Austin-East High, Vine Middle, and Sarah Moore Greene Elementary. The improvements in student learning, and in teacher effectiveness and collegiality as evidenced in annual surveys, has strengthened these schools.



Improving Recruitment of New Teachers

KCS was eager to develop a more effective recruitment system for new teachers that incorporated teacher voice and used social and other new media outreach. With NIET's assistance, new recruitment messaging, posters and advertising materials for job fairs were created. Social media was used to reach younger teachers and those in university programs in the region, especially teachers for hard-to-staff subjects. This outreach improved recruitment of new teachers as well as other teachers for career, mentor and master teaching positions. The district developed "Position Guides" to describe the different roles open to teachers along with "Evaluation and Compensation Guides" describing how evaluation results are tied to performance based compensation in their district. These efforts will support the Knox County project schools to continue building capacity and increasing the number of effective teachers providing instruction in hard-to-staff subject areas.

The work in these KCS schools aligned with the five-year strategic plan and its goal to *Invest in Our People*. This goal includes plans to create more "robust career pathways" across the entire district similar to those that can be found in the TAP schools. During the 2015-2016 school year, the district participated in state efforts to create teacher leadership models at the state level.

Driving Higher Levels of Support for School Leaders

The support for leadership teams and principals with setting school goals, developing plans for monitoring their work, and focusing school-level professional development has served as a model for more effective instructional support by district administrators. Within the current district office, this function did not exist formally in any other administrative or supervisory role, and principals' interactions with their direct supervisors were not often focused on this type of work. The strong results from the formal external evaluation and informal site visits provided support for this new approach and for a networked system of school support that highlights the district as a learning community.

The Knox County TIF3 project has fostered many benefits. One benefit is being able to align job-embedded professional development that is grounded in best practices not only at the campus level but at the district level as well. Another benefit is an improved ability to identify struggling administrators and provide targeted and timely support. For example, through the principal evaluation, a weak principal was identified at a high need school and was quickly replaced for the upcoming year with a proficient principal. The project has also promoted student awareness of their own learning styles along with their strengths and weaknesses. Through weekly meetings and ongoing support, teachers are trained to best meet student needs and educate them to be active learners themselves. All of these benefits ultimately impact our ability to improve educator effectiveness which directly improves student achievement.



<http://www.niet.org/newsroom/videos/event/28/59>



<http://www.niet.org/newsroom/videos/event/28/67>



<http://www.niet.org/newsroom/videos/event/27/58>

A Model for State Level Change

"TAP is a powerful program for a teacher who's been teaching one year, or 29 years." – Joyce Duncan, 2nd Grade Teacher

Knox County Schools' success in realigning district and school structures, budgets, compensation, and cultures to put great classroom teaching at the center of their work played a pivotal role in the development of the statewide Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) for teacher evaluation and support. TEAM is based on the TAP Teaching Standards used in KCS, and offers an online portal with resources and tools for teachers and administrators similar to the one used in KCS schools. The state level TEAM Coaches are trained and certified using the same best practices piloted in KCS schools.

Telling the Story

"The TIF grant, and our experience with TAP, has really reshaped the approach to effect instruction. It's made a big difference here, and our students are achieving things they never thought possible. That's the result of making effective teaching the centerpiece of our work. That's how we help students succeed in Knox County." – KCS Administrator

To share the impact of this work, the district and participating high need schools created brochures, videos of teachers and school leaders describing the work to share their story more broadly, along with newsletters and a website.. These resources and materials illustrate how changes in compensation, support, development and promotion can attract and retain effective and highly effective educators in high need schools.

Participating Knox schools have hosted visiting districts from across the state who are already using the same evaluation rubric in TEAM, but are eager to learn how these TIF schools are building on the rubric to create structures and supports that boost teacher effectiveness and student learning growth. Teachers describe how the evaluation system provides timely, meaningful and action-oriented feedback, and connects teachers with resources that support further growth. Knox County schools provide powerful on the ground evidence of how these additional supports can increase teacher effectiveness in high need Tennessee schools.



Principals Structuring Schools for Success:

Promoting Professional Learning to Increase Great Instruction

By Ryan Siebe, Dr. Danny Mendez, and Gene Morrow, Jr.

There have been many reports on what is *not* working in teacher professional development. A 2015 report—*The Mirage*—concludes that despite significant financial investments, current teacher professional development by and large doesn't seem to have any impact on teacher effectiveness.

This gloomy picture is brightened by at least one finding in the report, in which the authors note the value of accurate professional self-assessment.

Knox County Schools in the News

Empowering School Leaders: Using the Teacher Incentive Fund to Increase Instructional Support and Improvement co-written by Ryan Siebe - TAP in Focus 2016

Ryan Siebe, principal at Carter High School in Knox County Schools, shares how the TAP system has supported effective educators, resulting in students achieving more than a year's worth of academic growth for two consecutive years.

Three Area School Districts Reach "Exemplary" Status - WBIR

WBIR covered the announcement that Knox County Schools received an "exemplary" status in 2014-15 from the Tennessee Department of Education for its increased student achievement and shrinking achievement gap.

