

Increasing Educator Effectiveness: Lessons Learned from Teacher Incentive Fund Sites

The following is an excerpt from Jonathan Eckert, February 2013.

The Teacher Incentive Fund's (TIF) focus on high-need schools is designed to reverse the flow of more effective teachers away from these schools, and create an environment that attracts, develops, and retains accomplished educators. Examining five sites that are ending their TIF grants, (Algiers, LA; Amphitheater Unified #10, AZ; Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC; Guilford County Schools, NC; and South Carolina TAP) and four sites that are beginning to implement (Henrico County, VA; Indiana Department of Education; Knox County, Tennessee TAP; and Louisiana TAP), we see commonalities in their use of performance-based compensation systems (PBCS), and in how they align compensation with other aspects of teacher accountability and support. Based on the work of previous TIF sites and changes in the program's requirements, the four additional sites that received 2010 TIF money have gone even farther with the integration of compensation, professional development, career paths and evaluation. These sites seek to ensure that effective educators are teaching students with the greatest needs, and that these students are in schools led by effective principals. By improving instruction in these high-need schools over time, TIF supports sustained increases in student academic performance.

Five themes emerge from the opportunities and challenges at these TIF sites. The following themes include an illustrative example. A number of sites could have represented each theme.

1. Rigorous and accurate evaluation must take place in order to provide educators with realistic and meaningful feedback on their performance and a clear path toward improvement.

From 2007-2011, students in the Consortium of Algiers Charter Schools in New Orleans, Louisiana, have demonstrated tremendous growth in math and reading. Over those five years, the percentage of students considered proficient on Louisiana state assessments increased by approximately 25 percent. The educators who have facilitated this growth attribute much of this success to transparent analysis of both formative and summative assessment through weekly job-embedded professional development aligned with extensive support. Indiana is implementing a similar program that will align rigorous evaluation with meaningful feedback, and preliminary results are promising, as illustrated in a year-one report by Interactive, Inc. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) in Virginia attribute much of its success to its decision to implement TIF through its district's curriculum and instruction instead of human resources. CMS' Curriculum and Instruction Department administered its TIF resources. This emphasis on teaching and learning facilitated significant improvement on the design and implementation of student learning objectives that teachers and administrators developed.

2. Compensation is a key factor, but must be aligned with other aspects of human capital management to support improvements in instruction. Amphitheater Unified School District Project Excell! schools in Tucson, Arizona, have demonstrated statistically significant improvement in student growth from 2008-2011 in reading and mathematics on the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests. The program provides feedback through test scores, multiple evaluations, and weekly group meetings where teachers examine student work to identify areas for

instructional improvement. Guilford County, North Carolina's, Mission Possible schools demonstrated increased composite scores on state assessments from 2006-2010 at all levels, ranging from 10.6% at the middle-school level to 18.7% at the elementary-school level and 23.4% at the high-school level. Retention increased by 20% over the course of five years, and teachers and principals are using the evidence provided to improve practice with support at the school- and district-levels. Amphitheater, Guilford County and Henrico are identifying areas for growth in order to provide necessary instructional coaching for teachers.

3. Supporting teachers as individuals as well as teams creates a collaborative environment that emphasizes learning and improvement. All nine sites have created systems where collaboration is prioritized, supported and incentivized. Teams of teachers meet together at all of these sites, sometimes led by master or mentor teachers, to examine evidence and focus on student learning. Contrary to fears that performance pay will decrease collaboration, several sites have demonstrated increased collaboration. Interestingly, none of these sites has supported a fixed-tournament in which teachers compete against each other for bonuses.

4. Leadership positions with substantial autonomy and additional compensation attract effective educators to high-need schools. Knox TAP is using teacher leaders to drive impressive outcomes for students in high-need schools. Located in Tennessee—which has based the classroom observation portion of its new statewide evaluation system on the TAP evaluation rubric—Knox TAP is combining the resources of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching with job-embedded professional development, career advancement, strategic compensation, and rigorous evaluation focused on growth to recognize and spread teaching expertise. In 2011-12, the first full year of TAP implementation through the TIF 3 grant, 11 of 14 Knox TAP schools achieved more than two standard errors above a year of value-added growth in reading and math.

5. The experiences of schools and districts implementing reforms can have a significant impact on policy at the state and local level. South Carolina, Tennessee, Indiana and Louisiana are representative of this impact. All four states have taken lessons learned over the past six years at their local TAP sites to inform state policies around evaluation and compensation. For example, in South Carolina, the TAP evaluation system is one of the recommended statewide evaluation systems. Indiana's statewide teacher evaluation law also references TAP as an example. In Tennessee, experience with the TAP rubric in Knox provided a strong example as the state considered multiple possible rubrics as the basis for the statewide evaluation system TEAM: Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model.

These sites have sparked long-overdue experimentation around the introduction of performance measures into educator compensation systems. They illustrate how changes in pay structures and processes, teacher and principal evaluation systems, professional development based on evaluation results, and new data systems to support this work are playing out on the ground in districts and states. Ultimately, these are good investments that should be sustained as they are making a difference in state and local policy, and most importantly, for teaching and learning.