



# WHAT MAKES A *SUCCESSFUL* TAP SCHOOL?

MANY TAP PRACTITIONERS OBSERVE THAT TAP IS *THE* WAY THEY DRIVE TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT. HOW DO THE MOST SUCCESSFUL TAP SCHOOLS ACHIEVE CONSISTENTLY ABOVE AVERAGE RESULTS? NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING (NIET) RESEARCH FINDS THAT, REGARDLESS OF THEIR DISTRICT OR STATE, HIGH-PERFORMING TAP SCHOOLS SHARE FIVE KEY CHARACTERISTICS.

## 1 STRONG LEADERSHIP AND AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF SUPPORT

Strong leadership and infrastructure typically consist of a capable TAP Leadership Team (TLT) at the school level, coordinators at the district level and/or directors and their staff at the state level.

*Case in point:* **Texas TAP** is housed at a Regional Education Service Center of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and led by Texas TAP Executive Director Dr. Tammy Kreuz. The Texas TAP team provides ongoing, high-quality training and technical assistance to TAP schools through a staff of executive master teachers and regional coordinators. The state staff takes the lead in identifying and preparing new schools to enter TAP, ensuring fidelity to the key elements of the reform, and constantly evaluating ways to further strengthen implementation. Texas TAP has also established strong partnerships among the TEA, NIET, and TAP districts and schools. “These partnerships,” says Kreuz, “provide a network of support, enabling research, policy and practice to work together to maximize teacher quality and improve student achievement.” As a result, Texas TAP schools have demonstrated strong student learning gains, with 100 percent having achieved at least one solid year of value-added growth in 2009-10 and 68 percent *far exceeding* one year of growth.

## 2 MAKING TAP THE STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Because it aligns key systems—including professional development, teacher evaluation, career opportunity and performance-based compensation—with school improvement goals, TAP becomes the driver of school improvement.

*Case in point:* The **DeSoto Parish School System**, located in northern rural Louisiana, has distinguished itself as a leader in the Louisiana TAP effort through its consistent and strategic growth in the number of TAP schools and quality of implementation. TAP has grown from two schools in the 2008-09 school year to 10 schools in 2010-11, and with all 11 district schools by 2011-12, DeSoto will be the first in Louisiana to reach districtwide TAP implementation. TAP's abilities to foster teacher collaboration, promote leadership and build human capacity at the school level are keys to DeSoto's commitment to TAP. North DeSoto Middle School was named a 2010 TAP School of Promise for increasing its School Performance Score from 97 before TAP to 106 in 2009-10 after TAP implementation, and earning a schoolwide value-added score of "5"—indicating "far above average" results compared to similar schools in the state. Also in 2010, DeSoto Parish was placed in the state's "Top Ten List" for the largest district growth points and for the most schools meeting their growth targets.

## 4 CAPABLE TAP MENTOR AND MASTER TEACHERS

TAP principals work in partnership with master and mentor teachers who, along with the principal, form the TAP Leadership Team. The team's ability and dedication is key to providing a powerful vision for instructional excellence and for working with the faculty to make that vision a reality.

*Case in point:* Established in 2005 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the **Algiers Charter Schools Association (ACSA)** in New Orleans, Louisiana, selected TAP at the outset as its vehicle to strengthen professional support and development. The leadership team structure of master and mentor teachers, in working with principals, has helped to create a process of constant collaboration and teamwork with a laser-like focus on instruction and student achievement. As a result, the schools have experienced consistently-above-average student academic learning gains for three consecutive years. For the 2009-10 year, seven of the nine schools with value-added data achieved a "5," the highest score possible, signifying "far above average" student achievement growth compared to their peers across the state. One school earned a "4," signifying "above average" results, and one school received a "3," signifying a solid year's growth.

## 3 FULL AND CONSISTENT IMPLEMENTATION OF TAP ELEMENTS

The commitment and capability of TAP principals are crucial elements in a school's efforts to hire capable TAP Leadership Team members, create meaningful "cluster group" meetings, implement the TAP evaluation process and set up the performance-based compensation system.

*Case in point:* Principal Mike Savage's leadership in rigorously implementing TAP at **Audelia Creek Elementary School** in the Richardson Independent School District, Texas, earned the school the prestigious TAP Founder's Award in 2010. Before TAP, Audelia Creek was barely clinging to an "academically acceptable" state rating, largely due to a poor teacher retention rate of 33 percent. "TAP's embedded staff development, rubric for evaluation, as well as multiple career paths, student and teacher growth and economic incentives, have made a clear difference in my school's success," said Savage. "In TAP, you are always striving to get better and help teachers and students achieve." Since starting TAP in the 2005-06 school year, Audelia Creek has received the highest value-added score of "5" every year. The school's state ratings have reflected this achievement: two years of TAP showed a jump to "recognized" status from "academically acceptable," and in the 2008-09 year, Audelia Creek received the highest state rating of "exemplary." The school maintained its "exemplary" rating for the 2009-10 year.

## 5 COMMUNICATING TAP'S IMPACT AND DEMONSTRATING FULL SUPPORT FOR TAP TO TEACHERS, PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Communicating about TAP and the school improvements it produces is essential to long-term success. Leaders in successful TAP schools keep teachers fully informed and involved in the effort, and they reach out beyond their campuses to educate the community about TAP's impact.

*Case in point:* In South Carolina, **West Hartsville Elementary School** has been a model TAP site under the inspired leadership of Principal Dr. Kay Howell and the entire West Hartsville faculty. In the face of deep state and district budget cuts, Howell has been a vocal advocate, along with veteran master teacher Shannon Fraser, for TAP's potential to transform the education status quo. With its rigorous implementation of TAP and consistent student achievement growth, West Hartsville opens its doors to policymakers at the district, state and federal levels. The school is also a learning lab for practitioners, with a stream of visits from other TAP teachers and principals as well as other educators interested in investigating the use of TAP for their schools.