

# NIET

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING



## **TAP HIGH SCHOOL SYMPOSIUM:**

Lessons Learned from Principals and Teachers

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Since the 1999-2000 school year, TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) has been implemented in hundreds of schools across the nation and demonstrated an ability to raise student achievement, improve the quality of instruction and increase the ability of high-need schools to recruit, retain and support effective teachers. The TAP system has been implemented in schools across nearly 20 states in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal districts, as well as at the elementary, middle, junior, and high school levels. Throughout TAP's fifteen year history, much information has been learned with regard to the most effective and efficient method to ensure high fidelity implementation. As we continue to expand our partnerships with schools, this document specifically examines our lessons learned for implementation procedures at the high school level.

In the fall 2013, NIET held a High School Summit meeting, including principals and teachers from across the nation among our partnering schools, who have experience implementing the TAP system in high school environments. At this Summit, a series of conversations and breakout sessions were used to identify common issues and the effective solutions for implementing TAP in a high school. Among the topics discussed, the participants organized their conversations around three implementation themes and offered eleven solutions. Each of these topics is detailed throughout this document.

The first theme that emerged from the discussion centered on cluster groups, where the Summit attendees identified four common challenges and offered a wealth of key solutions to address those issues, including:

- Solutions to Cluster Configuration
  - › Common Content Planning - create a diverse leadership team with several different content experts and use grouping by humanities and STEM subjects.
  - › Size - use smaller cluster groups for increased individualized attention and to create meaningful relationships between members.
  - › Administrator Involvement - determine to make cluster a priority by intentionally making time to attend and taking an active role at meetings, which facilitates teachers' comfort with the evaluation process and on-going job embedded professional development.

- Solutions to Addressing the Shift from Content to Pedagogy in High Schools
  - › Content Specialization of Master and Mentor Teachers – allow for diversity of content backgrounds among master and mentor teachers; be intentional in planning and preparation as a leadership team for coaching each other on pedagogy; focus on reflection and share-outs when possible.
  - › Prioritizing Content in the Classroom – determine how student strategies support the standards each teacher is required to teach and allow appropriate time for pedagogy development to enhance delivery of instruction that supports student mastery of content.
- Solutions to Addressing the Transfer from Cluster to Classroom
  - › Communicating the Vision of Cluster – focus on thinking strategies that can be applied across content and be able to model how they are applicable for each subject; use student work from multiple contents as examples.
  - › Taking Cluster Back to the Classroom – be consistent during follow-up by modeling, co-teaching or observing at the same time each week to maximize development time with the same individuals every week.
- Solutions for Determining which Student Work to Analyze
  - › Lack of Specific Data – utilize all data sources available to determine trends across content areas; consider creating common assessments to measure progress in non-tested subject areas and grades.
  - › Analyzing Student Work with Specificity – focus on the trends and identify critical issues where student skill performance is breaking down using different work samples from different subjects/grades.

Additionally, the Summit attendees discussed the role of field testing at the high school level, noting the challenges of identifying whether the same strategy should be used across content areas or if different strategies should be used; determining which benchmarks are selected; differentiating across grade levels and various content levels within content areas (i.e. algebra/geometry); and using student work to monitor student achievement gains. The attendees also identified and discussed multiple solutions to each of these challenges, including:

- Solutions to Identifying What to Field Test: Strategies to Impact Skill Need and Pedagogy Needs of Teachers
  - › Assessment Gaps – use data from multiple exams to select a skill need applicable across content areas, which may not necessarily be the lowest performing area but an area that will increase students’ abilities to perform complex content tasks. This identification process allows field testing to identify a strategy or multiple strategies that will address the desired skill in all content areas.
  - › Skill Gaps – examine the skills that are needed for higher level content, then address the fundamentals to close the gap by determining how that skill is manifested in various content areas. Field test in multiple content areas to see how the skill breaks down across different content.
- Solutions to Determining Benchmarks
  - › Data, Reference Points and Frequency – use previous data to determine what skill to focus on, but assess everyone before field testing in each content area to identify a starting measure of the skill. Then create a post assessment to know if the strategy is working and if the outcome desired is being met. Also, create content benchmarks to assess the skill throughout the cluster cycle to stay on track with goals.
- Solutions for Differentiation Across Content and Grade Level
  - › Addressing Teacher Pedagogical Gaps – utilize the leadership team to determine specific teacher needs using evaluation data.
  - › Keeping Track of What Works – script field testing lessons to easily analyze best practices that impact student achievement. Also, assess the capacity of all teachers and scaffold as needed to build pedagogical knowledge of content teachers. While field testing strategies to address student skill needs, also keep in mind the instructional rubric needs of teachers. Incorporate best practices into field testing to demonstrate how best practices from the rubric support student learning.
  - › Strategy Across Content – field test in multiple content areas and in multiple classrooms (with students of varying academic ability levels) to improve buy-in, messaging and communication across the school.
- Solutions to Using Student Work to Drive Field Testing
  - › How to Select Student Work and What to Examine – identify the skill under review explicitly and identify what mastery looks like at the high school level before field testing. Look for those qualities in student work. Also, ensure the leadership team understands what mastery looks like in different content and grade levels. Monitor student progress using a high, medium and low sample of student work in each content area.

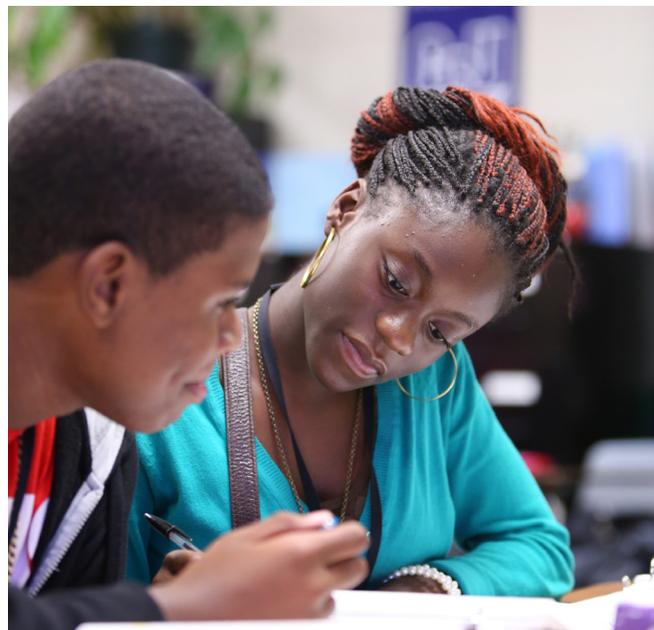


Finally, the group discussed the role of Follow-Up at the high school level to address the challenges regarding scheduling; pedagogy and content; and perceptions. The group also identified and discussed multiple solutions to each of these challenges, including:

- Solutions for Time and Scheduling
  - › Lack of Unencumbered Time – schedule all clusters to meet one day per week as possible to allow as much time as possible for follow-up. Also, schedule common planning time during the prior year to make sure master and mentor teachers who support one another are together and core areas are together. To the greatest degree possible, protect release time for mentor and master teachers.
- Solutions for Focusing on Pedagogy Over Content
  - › Credibility for Content Specific Follow-Up – organize teams by content areas and allow for maximum content diversity within the leadership team. Also, avoid limiting knowledge about the subject matter, rather focus on the pedagogy and establish a habit of referring to other content experts. Consider co-teaching rather than modeling, where the master/mentor teacher focuses on pedagogy while the career teacher focuses on content.

- Solutions to Addressing the Perception of Colleagues
  - › Colleague Perception – ensure classroom support involvement is for professional development. Identify a targeted purpose for support visits to avoid spending unstructured time in the classroom or becoming over-involved in content instruction. Work with teachers to know the expectations for modeling, team teaching, and observations.

The remainder of this report details the findings from this High School Summit, including the most common issues and the multiple solutions for each issue. Following the themes discussed by the participants, the report is separated into key sections and explores why these issues are different at the high school level and captures the experiences of the experts involved in the Summit.



## INTRODUCTION

### NIET Mission

Recognizing that an effective teacher is the most important school-based factor impacting student achievement, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) is committed to ensuring a highly skilled, strongly motivated, and competitively compensated teacher for every classroom in America. NIET supports states, districts and schools in recruiting, developing, supporting and retaining high-quality human capital in order to raise achievement levels for all students. NIET seeks to accomplish this commitment through its signature initiatives *TAP™: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement* and the *NIET Best Practices Center*.

### TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement Description

Introduced in 1999, the TAP system has become America’s leading comprehensive educator effectiveness model that offers powerful career advancement and leadership opportunities for educators, a fair and transparent evaluation process that is linked to job-embedded professional development and performance-based compensation. A brief description of each of these four core elements follows. For more information, visit [www.niet.org](http://www.niet.org).

- Multiple career paths. In TAP schools, skilled teachers have the opportunity to serve as master and mentor teachers, receiving additional compensation for providing high levels of support to career teachers and increasing instructional effectiveness across the faculty. Master and mentor teachers form a leadership team, along with administrators, to deliver school-based professional support and conduct evaluations with a high level of expertise.
- Ongoing applied professional growth. Led by master and mentor teachers, TAP teachers participate in weekly cluster group meetings where they examine student data, engage in collaborative planning, and learn instructional strategies that have been field-tested in their own schools. Teachers benefit from a national TAP database of instructional strategies and their colleagues’ experiences. Professional development continues in the classroom as master teachers model lessons, observe classroom instruction, and support teachers’ pedagogical improvement.



- Instructionally focused accountability. TAP teachers are observed in classroom instruction several times a year by multiple trained observers, including principals and master and mentor teachers, using rubrics for several dimensions of instructional effectiveness. Evaluators are trained and certified, and leadership teams monitor the reliability and consistency of evaluations in their schools. These classroom evaluations are complemented by analyzing student achievement growth, rounding out a multi-measure system of teacher evaluation. Evaluation results are used as formative feedback in one-on-one mentoring sessions, and guide planning for cluster group meetings.
- Performance-based compensation. TAP teachers have the opportunity to earn annual bonuses based on their observed skills, knowledge and responsibilities, their students' average achievement growth, and schoolwide achievement growth. Master and mentor teachers receive additional compensation based on their added roles and responsibilities, and principals can earn additional compensation based on schoolwide achievement growth and other measures of effectiveness.

### **Best Practices Center Description**

The NIET Best Practices Center (BPC) provides innovative services, support and solutions to schools, districts and states to improve educator effectiveness. Based on more than a decade of experience in schools across the country, the BPC works with its partners to redesign educator evaluation, deliver effective professional development, implement performance-based compensation systems and train teacher leaders in schools. The BPC offers a network of expert trainers and access to a range of innovative Web-based resources and tools. For more information, visit [www.nietbestpractices.org](http://www.nietbestpractices.org).

## **PURPOSE AND DESIGN OF SUMMIT**

In the fall 2013, educators were invited to participate in a day long summit to identify and discuss implementing the TAP system at the high school level. The participants were drawn from partnering schools across the nation, including administrators and teachers from traditional public and charter schools, and representing education agencies at the school, district, and state levels.

The purpose of this meeting was to collect information from different perspectives with regard to implementing the TAP system at the high school level. The Summit consisted of five sessions, beginning with a full group conversation to discuss broadly the issues surrounding implementation. This conversation lasted approximately one hour and was utilized to identify the most common issues and to direct participants to focus on high school specific issues rather than

general implementation issues. Specifically, participants were reminded to focus their discussion on “what makes the high school implementation different/unique”.

Next, all participants were assigned to one of two smaller groups of approximately eight participants. Each small group had a facilitator serving to lead the discussion. This two group format was used to conduct three breakout sessions for approximately 90-minutes each addressing implementation issues at the high school level. Following the breakout sessions, a final, full group session was held to wrap up the day. During this final session, the two facilitators summarized the conversation and asked for additional discussion on key concepts explored during the breakout sessions.

### **Findings and Results**

Throughout the Summit conversations and breakout sessions, school leaders described implementation issues and solutions related to TAP high school implementation. Throughout the discussion and topics, three overall themes and eleven solutions were offered; these solutions provide a structure for outlining the results section of this report:

#### **Issues and Solutions for Cluster at the High School Level**

School leaders mentioned challenges associated with participation in weekly cluster group meetings. Led by master and mentor teachers, these meetings provide an opportunity for teachers to examine student data together and learn instructional strategies that address identified student needs. Participants noted, however, that characteristics unique to the high school environment may provide obstacles for cluster meetings. Specifically, the following four obstacles were identified:

1. Cluster Configuration
2. Shift from Content-only Focus to Pedagogy
3. Transfer from Cluster to Classroom
4. Determining Which Student Work to Analyze

#### **Cluster Configuration**

School leaders voiced the need to consider the following factors when designing weekly cluster groups:

- Common Content
- Cluster Size
- Administrator Involvement

*Common Content:*

The content focused nature of high school courses, as compared to elementary or middle school courses, poses a challenge for determining cluster group meeting composition. Generally, NIET recommends clusters to be content specific in order to promote successful vertical planning and buy-in from teachers. However, organizing meetings by teacher content area creates a challenge in scheduling teacher prep time. Depending on the priorities of the administration, common content time may not be achievable if the focus is on quantity of classes offered throughout the day over scheduling the cluster.

Although content specific cluster meetings may pose a scheduling issue, school leaders voiced a belief that this type of group configuration may be more effective in helping teachers understand the link between skills discussed in cluster meetings and their content area.

*Cluster Size:*

Size is also an issue for cluster meetings due to the scheduling challenges as well. Attendance at cluster should be mandatory. Participants also noted the benefits of including aides, permanent subs, counselors, data coaches, and other additional staff in cluster, but noted building meaningful relationships between teachers and administrators and having high quality share-outs are difficult when the group is too large.

Summit attendees discussed the possibility of having a large cluster group and still having meaningful coaching and support by using a larger leadership team that allows for smaller group breakouts within the cluster. The key idea is that the people coached should be the people evaluated to help build meaningful relationships. One (master/mentor) teacher stated, “In my particular cluster we’ve tried to make sure... that we are supporting everybody in the room, but I really focus on those 3 teachers that I coach outside.”

*Administrator Involvement:*

Lack of administrator involvement is also an issue in cluster. Since their schedules are more rigid, administrators may have difficulty locating time to attend the cluster. Lack of opportunities to build a relationship with administrators in cluster leaves teachers believing that clusters may not be valued on campus and could make teachers uncomfortable in asking questions and feeling insecure during evaluation. The opportunity to use administrators as a content expert is also missed when they are unable to attend the cluster.

One participating principal explained, “You just have to prioritize... A lot of times I have to walk away from other stuff to be where I know I need to be when cluster is going on... If they’re

meeting, I try to attend.” Furthermore, “[Other factors] won’t really matter that much as long as you’re building those good positive relationships with the cluster members.” By making cluster attendance a priority for not only the teachers, but administrators as well, meaningful relationships that contribute to the strength of the team are built.

### Shift from Content-Only Focus to Pedagogy

Cluster group meetings focus on how teaching occurs and how students learn, otherwise known as pedagogy. However, school leaders discussed the challenge high school teachers may face in trying to understand how to use information from cluster group meetings because of the following two reasons:

- Content Specialization of Master/Mentor Teachers
- Making Content the Priority in the Classroom

#### *Content Specialization of Master/Mentor Teachers:*

The shift from content to pedagogy is a major challenge for cluster at the high school level. High school teachers are more focused on the content they teach, and the shift to pedagogy becomes difficult because they do not see how certain teaching techniques translate to their subject. Further, leadership teams may be challenged to demonstrate pedagogy which applies across content due to their own specialization. Conversely, when there are individuals on the leadership team with more of a pedagogical background rather than a content specific one, an issue of credibility for teachers is created because they may not see how members of the leadership team can help teach their subject.

One solution offered by participants for this issue is to spend dedicated time focusing on the rubric as good teaching practice. Participants further explained a need to focus on “what does it look like” and “what does it sound like” to make the connection between the rubric and the content. The focus becomes “how to teach” instead of “what to teach” and the tools learned from the rubric can be used to ensure that students are mastering the content.



Another key factor to support the shift from content to pedagogy is to focus on reflection in cluster. This process allows everyone to see best practices and how they worked for other teachers, and if not, why they did not work. Participants recommended use of student work at the beginning to tie in what was learned from the previous cluster. They did note a need to be cautious using this process, as a share-out can quickly consume the entire cluster time. However, the benefit of this process is that it also improves the cluster culture in that teachers can feel like they are being supported rather than judged.

*Making Content the Priority in the Classroom:*

There is an issue of prioritizing content in the classroom, so each teacher can effectively focus on the pedagogy. By prioritizing the content and allowing the classroom teacher to teach it, cluster teams can work together to focus on the skills and thought processes involved in teaching rather than getting into content issues, which can become divisive. This step and collaboration also needs support from district and school policies and an ability to communicate the vision of cluster. District support for prioritizing the content is required because the community and parents generally want to ensure that content is being delivered to their children; as such there is at times a weighted focus on what to teach rather than how to teach it. However, the ability to teach every subject more effectively is the focus of the cluster meetings, which will ultimately improve the delivery of content.

**Transfer from Cluster to Classroom**

Applying what was learned in cluster meetings to what is taught by each teacher is an essential piece of effective cluster meetings. To help make this process a smoother transition at the high school level the following issues were discussed:

- Communicating the Vision
- Cluster to Classroom

*Communicating the Vision:*

One issue for cluster at the high school level is communicating the vision and goals as well as demonstrating how the thinking skills addressed in cluster can transfer to the classroom in every day teaching. Master teachers often understand the vision or goals of the school and district, but forget that these may need to be communicated to career teachers during cluster.

One solution is to make sure that the student strategy taught in cluster is applicable across subject areas and can be modeled. The leadership team can pull student work from different content areas to use as examples to show how one strategy is applicable across content.

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This action helps teachers see that the strategy they are learning to use to teach students is essentially making them better at teaching their content overall. Additionally, within high schools, communication for how the strategy will help every student learn different content enables all teachers to be active participants in the cluster.

*Cluster to Classroom:*

Due to the content focused nature of high school subjects, teachers may struggle to see how the goals and strategies focused on during cluster can apply to their content specifically. Teachers can feel frustrated when they do not see the transfer from cluster to their classroom. Cluster leaders can also struggle to show that strategies can fit every content area and also be able to clearly identify the fit for each of their colleagues.

One solution is to use consistent follow-up to ensure that teachers are taking strategies from cluster to classroom and continuing to develop the strategies throughout the year. By following up with the same individuals each week, cluster group leaders can maximize development time and can address specific issues the teacher may be having with a particular strategy. Master and mentor teachers can also focus on the IGP for follow-up. One school used a system called “CANVAS” to analyze the weekly IGP reflections from their teachers. This action allowed them to spend more time focusing on reading the reflections to identify areas to improve. Another strategy is to have specialists in other content follow-up with teachers during cluster to address specific issues in the moment. One participant referred to this set of steps as “advancing from planning to co-teaching to modeling to walking through.”

**Determining which Student Work to Analyze**

School leaders also noted issues related to analyzing and discussing student work during weekly cluster meetings. Specifically, the following two issues were mentioned:

- Lack of Specific Data, Common Core Data
- Analyzing Student Work with Specificity

*Lack of Specific Data, Common Core Data:*

Analysis of student work and data presents another issue for cluster meetings as the leadership team tries to develop the goals of the cluster. In high schools, there can be a lack of sufficient student data as well as discontinuity within individual students across each grade level. Certain content areas are not state tested and often teachers are left with student data that can be several years old. Within some content areas, math for example, students may be tested in grade 9 and 11, but lack data from grade 10 because they took Geometry which often does not have a state test (e.g. end-of-course assessment).

Another issue is that the current data does not explicitly address Common Core, which is where many schools are moving to set goals that will align with Common Core. As one teacher stated the data is, “aligned to the old school and we’re going new school.”

Participants discussed several strategies related to these points. One solution is to focus more on student work rather than state test scores. Also, the absence of sufficient data in subject areas can facilitate conversations to emerge which address where testing needs to be developed. For example, several participants discussed how they incorporated other instruments and constructed district- or school-based instruments for assessment gaps. These assessment teams facilitated their direct involvement with the process and understanding what would be tested on for their subject areas.

*Analyzing Student Work with Specificity:*

Participants explained high school teachers can be challenged to identify and analyze student work with the same level of specificity as in elementary or middle school. In high school subjects, a higher complexity level may be needed within each skill, so teachers may be challenged to isolate with which part of the greater skill the student struggles. High school teachers also have a higher number of students who they see for a shorter amount of time during the day. This time



challenge reduces the high school teacher’s ability to identify trends and distinguish between knowledge shortages or “careless errors.”

Given the difficulty in analyzing student work at the high school level, the analysis may need to take place prior to coming to cluster to maximize the evaluation and reflection time. Rather than attributing student work errors to laziness or carelessness, identification of weakness where the skill is breaking down is needed. As one participant stated, “There also needs to be a greater focus on the connection that I do something therefore it has an impact on the child.” Another participant also noted that “if we expect to increase rigor in our classrooms then we have to also increase our own rigor in our cluster.”

## **ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS FOR FIELD TESTING AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL**

Field tests are used to measure the impact student strategies addressing specific data-driven needs have on student academic achievement and growth in content areas. Data from this process are used in various ways in TAP schools. High school summit attendees explained, however, that the following challenges occur when field testing in the high school environment:

1. Identifying What to Field Test
2. Determining Benchmarks
3. Differentiation Across Content and Grade Level
4. Using Student Work to Drive Field Testing

### **Identifying What to Field Test**

School leaders discussed difficulty regarding the identification of what to field test and raised the following issues in need of additional consideration for the implementation of TAP at the high school level:

- Assessment Gaps
- Skill Gaps

#### *Assessment Gaps:*

The lack of data at the high school level can increase the difficulty in determining what to field test. State assessments do not always provide skill gap data, which makes determining what specific skills students are underperforming more difficult.

To address this, school leaders suggested that data be pulled from multiple exams such as classroom work, the state exit exam, ACT and SAT. When looking at the data, the focus is not

on the lowest performing strands, but the strands that affect thinking skills in multiple content areas. One participant stated, “For example we saw word analysis was weak in English/Language Arts, we saw that data analysis was weak in Mathematics so the whole concept of analyzing was something our students could not do very well.” This method helps to get the most out of field testing by addressing as many students and content areas as possible. Another approach is to look at the state standard and then determine how that standard is applied to different content areas to determine what skills need to be targeted in the field test.

#### *Skill Gaps:*

Many times when a student lacks a certain skill at the elementary level, this deficiency can follow them throughout their education, and the gap continues to get wider with every grade that passes. As such, the distinction on identifying the missing skill can be more challenging for high school teachers, and they can struggle to find a specific strategy to affect the student’s particular need.

As a solution to address skill gaps at the high school level, participants suggested that the fundamental skills needed for the higher level strategy should be addressed in order to close that skill gap. Participants also stated the importance of demonstrating how each skill works interdependently to achieve a more complex content task. This process allows students to connect and use that strategy across content areas. Participants also recommended that field testing be done in multiple content areas to see how the skill breaks down in different content in order to recognize skill gaps in all students.

#### **Determining Benchmarks**

Participants also discussed the difficulty determining benchmarks because of issues related to:

- Data, Reference Points and Frequency

#### *Data, Reference Points and Frequency:*

Participants discussed issues with the number and frequency of benchmarks in high school. In particular, participants discussed the extent to which the available scores are from the previous year’s assessments, which means some new students will have no data, while other students’ data are available but the students have transitioned to other schools. The student and data disconnect and the increased rate of mobility of students in high school can make it difficult to track progress throughout the cluster cycle. There also may not be an assessment available to track the progress of some students.

Participants recommended that teachers use data from the previous year to determine what skill to focus on, but also assess students before field testing to establish a starting point for each skill. A post-assessment should also be created to know if the strategy is working and achieving the desired outcome. Benchmarks should also be created throughout the entire cluster cycle to stay on track with goals. Participants explained the need to assess all levels throughout the field test and not just the lowest performing students because “if we are just focusing on [lower level students], there is no growth going on with the kids that are proficient or better.”

### **Differentiation Across Content and Grade Level**

Participants expressed that the following factors contribute to difficulty differentiating what content to field test and for what grade levels:

- Variation in Student Skill
- Variation in Teacher Skill
- Strategy Across Content

#### *Variation in Student Skill:*

Participants discussed the variation in the skill level of students not only across grade levels, but within grade levels as well due to remedial and honors or advanced placement classes. A strategy might be too broad for lower level students and conversely, too tedious for higher level students. One participant summarized, that “there is no one size fits all” approach at the high school level. Another participant stated, “Once you get the student work back, avenues open up for what might happen, but it’s really important in that field test for the master or mentor teacher to go in with all the students at these different levels and try those things out and get something that works for that child.” The focus is on the impact the teaching strategy has on the students’ learning. Participants explained the importance of ensuring that the strategies teachers learn in cluster become incorporated into their decision making because, as one participant stated, “pedagogy is only as good as how you use it to make decisions on the spot in your classroom.”

Another solution is to field test in as many different content areas, grade and skill levels as possible. The more this can be done, the better. While an exact number of areas is too difficult to establish given differences across schools and educators, as well as differences in strategies, the participants recommended using at least three content areas (English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and one ancillary area) and one specialist area (humanities, physical education, technical). If the number of areas possible for field testing is limited, participants recommended selecting a class typical of the building, which includes the most diversity in content and skill. Other



participants explained that they have also created a sample group that is representative to field test strategies. Regardless of the number of field tests conducted, using multiple scenarios is beneficial.

Participants also recommended having content diversity among master and mentor teachers who are capable of field testing student strategies and teaching techniques in multiple content areas. One teacher stated, “I think it helps because we’re not doing separate strategies, so I hear teachers from different content areas having little ‘aha’s’, not only to say, that’s the main idea in English, but I

see how that looks in a Math word problem... They are making connections related to the skill.” School leaders also emphasized the importance to think intentionally, in planning and preparation, regarding how to help teachers make the shift. Focusing on and modeling various subjects, even though outside of one’s specific content area, may show how the strategy is applicable across content areas. Another best practice is to spend more time as a leadership team planning and coaching each other, as well as field testing the strategies before bringing them to cluster, which allows for effectively modeling the strategies across content.

#### *Variation in Teacher Skill:*

Variation in teacher skill is also an issue at the high school level. Due to the content focused nature of high school, teachers often have skill gaps related to pedagogy. The capacity of the leadership team to create and carry out a field test might be an issue as well.

Leadership teams must assess their own capacity as well as the teachers in the cluster. Depending on the strategy employed, some members of the leadership team will be more prepared to scaffold it for student learning in specific content areas. Regardless, the capacity in the leadership team has to be built to make sure everyone gets to where they need to be. In addition, leadership teams must determine the success of a field test based on improvements in student work. Field tests end only when a significant academic gain is noted in student performance. As one participant explained, “We may use 6 lessons to complete a field test, but sometimes it might need to be spread out over 8 weeks.”

Another key factor that affects field testing is whether or not there are multiple qualified people conducting the field test, as well as scripting and videoing. Identifying critical attributes – what

students are saying and doing to produce high quality work, and what the teacher is saying and doing to help students get there — is important. Many times the teacher giving the lesson does not know specifically what they said or did to help a student achieve a certain outcome. As one participant stated, the information you gather during the field test is not useful “unless you are intentionally tracking and gathering data and student work and paying attention to what you do to differentiate for that diverse group of people that you are now including in your field test group.”

*Strategy Across Content:*

Participants explained that in a high school setting, unlike elementary schools where a strategy can be field tested in multiple classrooms, teachers face the challenge that a strategy might not be clearly related to their particular content, which can lead to reduced buy-in. To address this concern, participants explained the need for field testing in multiple content areas and multiple classrooms. Allowing multiple subject areas and multiple sets of teachers to understand the connection to each strategy increases buy-in, messaging and communication. The participants also explained that over time, every teacher in every content area will be looking for ways to connect the strategy, which is when this process takes hold and becomes part of the culture within the school.

**Using Student Work to Drive Field Testing**

Many attendees mentioned difficulty using student work to drive field testing because of uncertainty regarding the following:

- How to Select Student Work and Where to Focus

*How to Select Student Work and Where to Focus:*

As one participant stated, “Student work drives field testing by helping you determine if it was successful and allowing you to monitor progress.” The student work should tell teachers whether they need to move on, work longer on the same strategy, engage in additional differentiation, or go in a different direction.

Participants also noted that prior to field testing, the student skill need, as well as what mastery of that skill looks like, must be defined. To do this, teachers need to deconstruct the standard they are working on into skills and identify what the preliminary skills required for students to master the standard are at that level of expectation. This process requires the entire leadership team to understand what the expectation is in different content and grade levels and clearly communicate those expectations to all teachers on campus.

Another solution to selecting student work is to choose a high, medium and low sample of student work and show the students, leading them through analysis and reflection, to let them evaluate the work according to the criteria. This action allows students to understand what high quality work looks like and what is expected of them. One participant explained in her school, the students, without knowing which example fit in which category, identified the high, medium, and low samples correctly, which let her know that students understand how their work should be completed.

## **ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL**

Master and mentor teachers are responsible for ensuring that goals and activities are supported with follow-up for proper classroom applications. However, school leaders expressed that the following three factors pose challenges for proper follow-up in high schools:

1. Time and Scheduling
2. Focus on Pedagogy Over Content
3. Perception of Colleagues

### **Time and Scheduling**

Difficulty scheduling time for follow-up proved to be an important point of discussion. Overwhelmingly, school leaders attributed this difficulty to the following factor:

- Lack of Unencumbered Time

### **Lack of Unencumbered Time:**

One of the main challenges for follow-up at the high school level is being able to allocate sufficient time. The block schedules of some high schools provide less release time for masters and mentors, especially if the cluster meeting is scheduled during their release time. Participants discussed that, at times, some mentor and master teachers only follow-up with teachers with the highest need in order to maximize time. However, participants shared this follow-up method may create a stigma where teachers do not want the follow-up because that means they are not performing well.

The more release time the masters and mentors have, the better it will be for scheduling. One strategy is to hold all cluster meetings during the same day to free up another day for follow-up. Another strategy is to create common planning time the year before so follow-up time is

embedded. Participants also discussed grouping masters and mentors together into core areas. In addition, administrator support was discussed as the key to protecting master and mentor release time, and participants recommended administrators avoid pulling masters and mentors to other meetings when they have follow-up planned.

### **Focus on Pedagogy Over Content**

School leaders expressed concern that a focus on pedagogy may make follow-up difficult. This concern stems from reduced credibility for master and mentor teachers following up with individuals outside their content area.

- Credibility for Content Specific Follow-Up

#### **Credibility for Content Specific Follow-Up:**

Participants discussed the view that master or mentor teachers might not be equipped to give follow-up support to a teacher in a specific content area. Similarly, high school content teachers might not welcome feedback from those outside their subject.

Participants discussed one strategy to minimize content barriers to follow-up is focusing on the pedagogy and labeling it for teachers. The culture should be established that it is acceptable to refer to other content experts when there is need for a specific content piece. Participants also discussed a need to show the master or mentor teachers are not being discredited when recommending content help, rather they are recognizing and illustrating the need to seek assistance from multiple sources.

One participant captured this thought by stating, “We often don’t utilize one of our biggest resources which is our career teachers’ content expertise.” Participants also discussed that co-teaching rather than modeling can be done, which allows the master or mentor to focus on the pedagogy while a fellow career teacher coaches on the content piece and serves as the content expert. Participants noted that recognizing career teachers as content experts also improves buy-in.

Another solution for addressing content specific follow-up is to group teachers by content if



possible. This grouping is beneficial for creating vertical conversations because master and mentor teachers follow-up with individuals that are in the same content area. Also, more diversity in the leadership team provides increased opportunity for members to support each other in follow-up. The important idea is to be genuine and have transparency to admit when one needs to defer to other content experts because when one “fakes it”, teachers can tell and the expert may lose credibility. This issue is usually most prevalent for first year schools implementing TAP because the leadership team is not as experienced in coaching toward instructional goals.

### Perception of Colleagues

Several school leaders indicated that the viewpoints of others influenced the ability to provide effective follow-up. Specifically, the perceptions of the following groups were mentioned:

- Perception of Colleagues

#### *Perception of Colleagues:*

Teachers might perceive follow-up support as evaluation especially if the support comes from a master or mentor outside of their content, or if an observation follow-up is used. In these circumstances, teachers may be less willing to be coached and supported if their credibility as a teacher is viewed as under evaluation.

One solution to minimize the negative perception of follow-up is to explain it as professional development, so the teachers and students understand why master and mentor teachers are coming in for follow-up. Another idea is to embed the strategy in the content, so the career teacher is not following a script, rather making practical instructionally-related adjustments intended to get students to respond positively. Participants also explained the need to avoid spending too much time in one teacher’s classroom or becoming over-involved. The support should be focused on a strategy, and the feedback needs to remain specific to that strategy. Master and mentor teachers need to know when to leave and let the career teachers take back over their classrooms. The more time spent working together, the more each teacher will know the expectations for modeling, team teaching, and observations.

### Conclusion

*TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement* (TAP) stands out because of its more than a decade-long track record of growth and success in raising student achievement in schools. Throughout this time frame, the evidence also reveals key reasons for TAP’s positive impact: an evaluation system capable of differentiating teacher performance levels and providing detailed

feedback for improvement, ongoing professional growth in classroom practice using student and teacher data to guide improvement, recruitment and retention of effective teachers, and the creation of a challenging, rewarding, and collegial environment focused on high-quality instruction and student learning.

This report is an extension of that long standing history by taking a targeted look at implementing TAP in high schools. This report details information provided by educators representing districts and schools across multiple states. The implementation process in high schools was investigated throughout this meeting, and the participants provided a wealth of information – acknowledging the issues for high schools and identifying solutions proven in practice.

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As a former high school teacher and administrator, I appreciate the collaboration focused on refining and improving the TAP System model at the high school level. The participants in this high school summit and past summits have identified and offered clear solutions to strengthen the high school implementation. I look forward to the on-going dialogue and future summits that will continue to advance implementation efforts around the country.

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