



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE MOST EFFECTIVE LEVER FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IS ALREADY IN YOUR BUILDING

Teacher leaders, already in your building, are a powerful force for school improvement. They are the key to scaling high-quality instruction, improving professional learning, and retaining talent within existing budgets. Based on 25 years of proven results, NIET demonstrates how to achieve better student outcomes by building the capacity of teachers and leaders.

NIET's TAP System is a comprehensive staffing solution centered on teacher leadership that provides professional growth opportunities for teachers and increases instructional excellence in classrooms across a district. Investing in teacher leadership roles fuels a leadership development pipeline that produces school and district leaders with strong instructional leadership skills.

This is a proven approach.

Research shows that NIET partner schools increase student achievement by 7 percentage points above comparable schools, and teachers' intended retention is 12 points higher. In 2023, the National Bureau of Economic Research released a statewide study of the impact of NIET's TAP System model, demonstrating a significant impact on student academic achievement and a \$14 to \$1 return on investment.

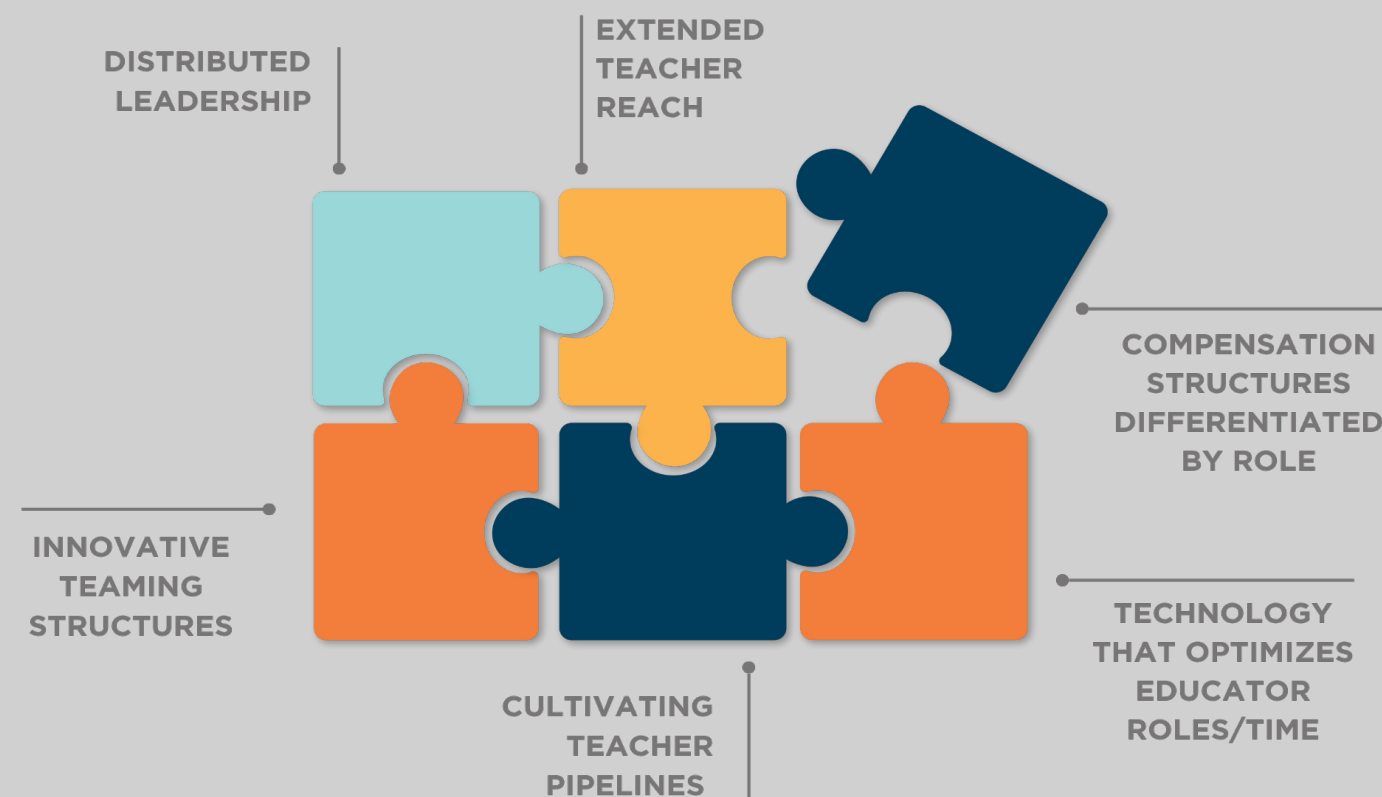
Strategic staffing is a cost-effective, proven approach that enables school systems to achieve better results with their current staff and budget resources. The TAP System operationalizes strategic staffing through six core elements.

ACHIEVING BETTER RESULTS: HOW EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC STAFFING INCREASES TEACHER AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

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How the TAP System Operationalizes Strategic Staffing



INTRODUCTION

The need for more strategic use of staff and resources in schools is urgent. Teachers need high-quality professional learning to use a high-quality curriculum and differentiate instruction for students effectively. Yet school systems and structures are not designed to help teachers at different levels of effectiveness grow and improve in their use of the curriculum over time. And many school systems do not have processes in place to ensure that students who need the most support have access to effective instruction.

Achieving better results for students requires recognizing and tapping into the teachers and school leaders with high levels of expertise to drive continuous improvement.

What if schools could take the same staff and resources but get dramatically different results?

NIET’s strategic staffing model, the TAP System, elevates teachers into instructional leadership roles, improves teacher practices, and increases student access to high-quality instruction. Research shows that NIET partner schools

increase student achievement by 7 percentage points above comparable schools, and teachers’ intended retention is 12 points higher.

Over the last twenty-five years of working with state and school system partners, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) has helped school systems achieve better results within existing budgets by building the capacity of their staff. This paper describes how NIET is partnering with school systems to establish and implement strategic staffing, teaming, and compensation systems that leverage the skills of teacher leaders working with school leaders to improve instruction.

Teachers have long expressed a desire for more opportunities to collaborate with peers, receive support from expert teachers, and have access to a career path that allows them to grow and take on new roles and responsibilities. Today’s teachers want instructional leadership roles, and such roles can be leveraged to bridge the capacity gap in instructional leadership that is preventing progress at many schools.

THE TAP SYSTEM: NIET’S STRATEGIC STAFFING MODEL TO ADDRESS TEACHER CHALLENGES

There are six commonly held characteristics of strategic school staffing.¹ These strategies establish a structure of distributed leadership, extend the reach of effective teachers through innovative teaming structures, and leverage technology to support improvement.

NIET works with district partners across multiple states to implement a model of strategic staffing called the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement that incorporates these six strategies, resulting in improvements in teacher effectiveness, recruitment, retention, and, ultimately, student achievement.

Six Characteristics of Strategic Staffing

Characteristics of Strategic Staffing	How NIET’s TAP System Operationalizes Strategic Staffing
Distributed leadership	Build instructional leadership capacity across a team of school and teacher leaders and use this expanded school instructional leadership team for data-driven decision-making, goal setting, and regular progress monitoring. Master and mentor teachers become members of the school instructional leadership team.
Innovative teaming structures	Teacher leaders “in source” professional learning by field-testing student strategies in classrooms, planning and facilitating professional learning, and following up in individual classrooms to support effective application. This structure differs from traditional professional learning communities (PLCs) by placing trained expert teacher leaders in charge of collaborative teams, with clear responsibility for instructional coaching and follow-up.
Extended teacher reach	Master teachers are expert teachers who coach, model, co-teach, and field test student strategies in the classrooms of team members each week. They spend approximately 75% of their time supporting teachers to improve instruction and plan and facilitate professional learning for their team. Mentor teachers spend approximately 3-4 hours per week supporting classroom instruction, observing, and providing feedback in teachers’ classrooms.
Staffing structures that intentionally cultivate teacher pipelines	Master and mentor teachers differentiate their support for teachers based on need. The team system benefits teacher candidates and paraprofessionals as they observe expert teachers coaching in classrooms, participate in professional learning teams, and interact with more experienced teachers. Teachers leaders often move up into school and district leadership positions.
Compensation structures differentiated by role	Districts differentiate compensation by offering additional pay for a teacher leadership role and for effectiveness as measured using an evidence-based instructional rubric for classroom teaching and student learning growth.
Technology that optimizes educator roles/time	Technology offers increased access to watch and analyze a classroom lesson, along with the pre- and post-conference between the classroom teacher and their observer or coach. This facilitates the sharing of strong instructional practices and building a reflective learning culture.



DeSoto Parish Schools, Louisiana

WHY REIMAGINE THE TEACHING ROLE AND THE SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT TEACHERS?

“ Our focus is on growing students, but to do this, we need to grow teachers. Aligning our systems to help teachers grow and improve generates excellence in the classroom. It creates a continuous cycle of improvement as more teachers want to join a team that helps them to be the best teachers they can be.

– Pat Mapes, Superintendent of Hamilton Southeastern Schools, Indiana

Everyone wants to grow and improve in their profession, but many teachers feel isolated in their classrooms with few opportunities to collaborate or work as a team. By creating team-based systems for continuous improvement, schools are better able to attract and retain talented individuals.

In addition to improving overall teacher effectiveness, strategic staffing addresses another difficult challenge – getting effective teachers to the students who need them most. Students from low-income backgrounds and students with the greatest needs often have the least access to effective teachers. As a result, student achievement disparities and learning gaps persist. Strategic staffing can address gaps by focusing support from expert teacher leaders on teachers and students with the greatest needs. Teacher leaders help to identify what is working with students and teach those skills to other teachers.

As more teachers enter the profession from non-traditional preparation pathways, expert teacher leaders can provide differentiated support for teachers with a range of skills and knowledge. This is particularly important as teachers implement a high-quality curriculum that requires high-quality instructional practices. The teaming system gives teacher leaders the time, resources, and authority to tailor support for teachers learning a new curriculum, such as early career teachers, teachers moving to a new grade or

content area, second career teachers, Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers, and those prepared through non-traditional pathways.

Research-based strategies to support teachers to improve, including classroom coaching, collaborative professional learning, and growth-oriented observation and feedback, are highly labor-intensive. In our experience, principals must elevate teachers into instructional leadership roles in order to provide the quality and quantity of support necessary to change teacher practice and student learning experiences.

In 2023, the National Bureau of Economic Research released a statewide study of the impact of the TAP System model for strategic staffing. The study followed cohorts of eighth graders in South Carolina and found implementation of the TAP System had a significant impact on student academic achievement while creating longer-term benefits, including reduced reliance on social welfare programs and reduced arrest rates.

The longer a student was exposed to the TAP System, the greater the benefits, producing a \$14 to \$1 return on investment.² This builds on examinations of the impact of the TAP System across several locations by different researchers using varied methodological frameworks that consistently show its positive impacts on student and school outcomes.³

Bringing teachers into instructional leadership roles also enables schools and school systems to create a talent pipeline. Teacher leaders gain experience helping other teachers to improve

their practice and help students to grow. This experience is transforming how schools think about developing the next generation of leaders at the school and district levels.

OPERATIONALIZING STRATEGIC STAFFING THROUGH TEACHER LEADERSHIP

District leaders play an important role in creating coherence and consistency between district initiatives, processes and structures, and school-based teams. The success of team-based staffing structures depends heavily on school- and district-level support for these new structures and roles. For example, introducing an instructional initiative such as a high-quality curriculum should use, rather than bypass, the team structure to provide teachers with opportunities to learn, apply, and analyze the impact in their classrooms.

Distributed Leadership: Engage teacher leaders in the instructional leadership team and shared decision-making.

“ When you are a teacher leader, it not only means you are a leader of teachers, but also that you are a teacher who is a leader. Teacher leaders want to have that broader leadership impact but absolutely do not want to give up teaching in classrooms.

– Laura Roussel, Chief Academic Officer at Jefferson Parish Schools, Louisiana

Distributed leadership builds instructional capacity across a team of school and teacher leaders and uses this expanded leadership team to set goals and regularly monitor progress, lead collaborative learning teams, and provide high-quality coaching and feedback. This expansion of instructional leadership capacity is critical to the success of school-based strategies that research has shown improve teaching and accelerate learning: teacher participation in structured collaborative learning and individual classroom coaching.⁴

Given the many demands on principals’ time, they do not have the bandwidth to provide these supports for each teacher by themselves. This is particularly true in high schools where teachers are looking for feedback and coaching in their content area. In addition to a lack of time, many principals report that they need additional development to know what to look for when observing teachers and how to provide strong feedback.

Research shows that collaborative professional learning teams are more effective when expert teacher leaders plan and facilitate the learning.^{5,6} Teacher leadership roles provide the additional capacity and expertise necessary to put these effective strategies for collaborative learning and coaching in place.

School systems using the TAP model establish two teacher leader roles: master teachers who spend approximately 75% of their time on instructional leadership and coaching, and mentor teachers who spend several hours each week supporting instructional leadership and coaching but maintain their own classrooms.

Teacher leaders lead teacher collaborative learning teams that meet for one to two hours weekly during contract time in grade-alike or subject-alike groups. Team learning meetings are led by expert instructors in the school — the master and/or mentor teachers — and their activities are focused on instructional practices as determined by student needs. In many cases, existing leadership roles, such as department chair, are reconfigured as master teacher roles with greater responsibility for coaching and leading professional learning teams.

Instructional Leadership Teams

Teacher leaders play a key role in the schoolwide instructional leadership team (ILT), lead teacher collaborative teams, and provide classroom coaching, as described in the figure below.

Leadership teams identify a core group of teachers who demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and proficiencies of a highly effective teacher, along with the ability to use data, provide coaching, and influence change in other teachers’ classrooms. Teacher leaders joining the leadership team are selected and trained to share effective instructional practices with other teachers throughout the building to help solve instructional problems.

The instructional leadership team is the core of the TAP System’s improvement strategy, coordinating the work of weekly collaborative teams and ensuring that teachers have the support to apply new learning in their classrooms.

Innovative Teaming Structures:
Use teacher leaders to create an effective, coherent professional learning and coaching system.

“Building leaders should support teachers and work with students, but they also have to manage the building and deal with other facets of administration. As a teacher leader, I can be more focused on teachers and support them full-time. This allows us to improve instruction for students.

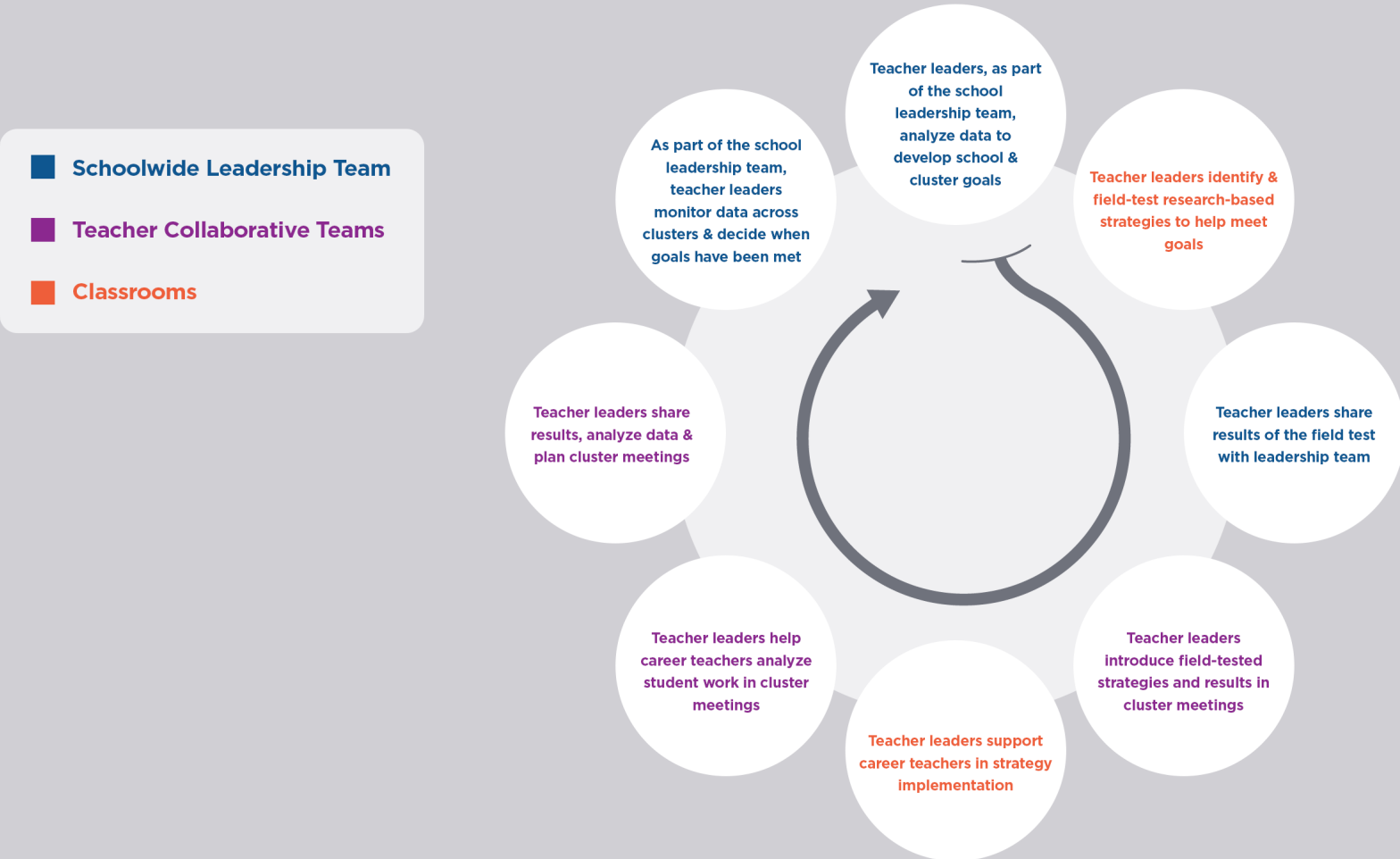
– Stephen Prince, Master Teacher at Cross County School District, Arkansas

Teacher leaders benefit from the use of common tools and protocols, such as an evidence-based instructional rubric and a protocol for collaborative teamwork. These tools enable teachers and school leaders to create consistency in providing feedback, share a common approach to instructional leadership, and grow their instructional practice together.

Teacher Collaborative Teams

Teacher collaborative teams meet in small "cluster" groups of about 6-10 teachers in order to individualize support, promote collaboration, and build relationships. To accommodate group sizes and configurations, the ratio of master and mentor teachers can be adjusted. For example, at the high school level, there are generally fewer master teachers and a larger number of mentor teachers. This allows a master teacher with a math or science specialization to lead a STEM group, which includes mentors who teach a range of STEM subjects.

Teacher Leader Roles in Collaboration and Professional Learning



New teacher collaboration structures require redesigning school schedules to allow for weekly high-quality professional learning during school hours. In addition, time is required for teacher leaders to plan, facilitate, and follow up after each meeting in individual classrooms and to field test student strategies in classrooms each week.

To successfully lead collaborative learning teams in ways that change instruction and improve learning across classrooms, teacher leaders need to engage in strategic thinking and both short- and long-range planning. They also need to skillfully analyze data and student work, understand and apply assessments, research, and field test student strategies before bringing them to the team, and lead other adults in a collaborative learning process.

When follow-up coaching is taking place in a science classroom, for example, a mentor teacher with science expertise joins the master teacher. This provides teachers with support for instructional practice that is specific to their subject and curricula. High school teacher leaders also find that using smaller breakout groups within the meeting is a way to support everyone in the room with high-quality share-outs and development time.

The schedule also enables teacher leaders to participate in the school-level instructional leadership teams, providing critical feedback for the leadership team to better understand and act on teacher and student needs across content areas.

Teachers in NIET partner schools report they are four times more likely to apply professional learning in their own classroom when they receive individualized support from a teacher leader.⁷

Extended Teacher Reach: Identify great teachers and give them a formal leadership role.

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I became a teacher leader because I wanted to impact more than just my students. I was experiencing success in my classroom, and I wanted to see that across my school and district. I wanted to be a part of the change process to raise student achievement district-wide. As a teacher leader, I get to build the capacity of everyone.

– Latonzia Beavers, Master Teacher at Natchitoches Parish Schools, Louisiana

Teacher leadership roles extend the reach of effective teachers. Master teachers model, co-teach, and field test instructional strategies in classrooms. This brings the most effective teachers into the classrooms of team members every week. Mentor teachers also observe, coach, and provide feedback.

School systems must provide sufficient release time for teacher leaders to perform their leadership responsibilities and protect that time so it is reserved for core instructional leadership responsibilities. It is also important that the time for teams to meet each week is protected and not consumed with administrative tasks.

The team structure allows teacher leaders to focus more intensive support on teachers and students with the greatest needs, for example, by modeling a lesson in a new teacher’s classroom. Teacher leaders also bring back information to the school leadership team about what is happening in classrooms, providing a critical part of the feedback loop that improves both professional learning and coaching. A protocol

for collaborative teamwork and planning helps to ensure that team meetings provide relevant, timely, and actionable learning and development for teachers.

Shifting to Focus on Pedagogy Across Content Areas

Teacher leaders field-test instructional strategies across multiple content areas, helping show the relevance of instructional practices to all teachers. This is particularly useful at the high school level, where teacher leaders may find it challenging to demonstrate instructional practices that apply across content areas due to their own specialization. High schools have addressed this challenge by elevating a broader range of content area specialists with knowledge and credibility in a subject area to the mentor role.

Teacher teams spend dedicated time in weekly meetings focusing on strong instructional practices using a research-based rubric that gives teachers the ability to connect evidence-based strategies to their specific content area. These practices build collective efficacy through feedback, data analysis, clarity around goals, and planning.⁸ This learning is followed up in classrooms where teachers receive support from a mentor with similar content expertise.



Ascension Public Schools, Louisiana

Staffing Structures That Intentionally Cultivate Teacher Pipelines: Create multiple, interconnected teacher leadership roles sequenced in a career ladder.

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As a teacher leader, I could see who was helping students to make the greatest gains. We identified and taught those skills to other teachers. That experience was the foundation of my approach as a principal.

– Omar Duron, Superintendent of Somerton School District #11, Arizona

Creating a tiered teacher leadership structure establishes a pipeline for growing instructional leadership and a career ladder that identifies and cultivates future instructional leaders.

The coaching and support system benefits teacher candidates and residents as they observe experts in the classroom and are included in professional learning teams with more experienced teachers. With their expertise and release time, master teachers are able to provide intensive support for new teachers and help them to be more successful earlier in their careers.

Supporting CTE, Second Career, or Novice Teachers

Teacher leadership and mentoring in the classroom are critical for all subjects, particularly for CTE teachers who enter the classroom as a second career, often without formal teacher preparation training. At the high school level, all teachers, including CTE teachers, benefit from participation in weekly collaborative professional learning organized into cycles of learning. NIET’s “5 Steps for Effective Learning” protocol provides instructional leaders with a systematic process to ensure that the valuable time teachers spend in collaborative team meetings is focused and productive.⁹

NIET’s 5 Steps for Effective Learning



The steps are designed to help leaders facilitate meetings that are well-planned and aligned to specific student needs identified through data, introduce instructional strategies grounded in the curriculum, support teachers in planning how they will apply this learning in their classroom, and create a plan for measuring the impact on student learning. The “5 Steps for Effective Learning” protocol creates a process for continuous improvement that is used and reinforced at multiple levels, including leadership team meetings.

Compensation Structures Differentiated by Role: Pay teacher leaders for taking on instructional leadership roles and responsibilities.

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Differentiated compensation for teacher leaders highlights the value they bring to their schools and teams. For me, being a teacher leader is a powerful opportunity for personal and career growth.

— Laura Hershberger Master Teacher at Avondale Elementary School District, Arizona

Selecting teacher leaders requires a rigorous, competitive process to identify teachers who can lead beyond the classroom, model best practices, work effectively with adults, analyze data, and help teachers apply evidence-based instructional strategies. Providing additional compensation is essential in attracting qualified teachers to the role and recognizing them for success in growing teachers and students. In addition to the benefits for individual teachers, differentiated compensation helps to ensure that the role of teacher leader is not an honorific but a real role with real responsibilities.

To be effective, teacher leaders need the authority, time, and resources to improve instruction, and paying them for these roles shows that school and district leaders prioritize and value the position. Success in the role of teacher leader is measured using evidence-based rubrics for classroom instruction, collaborative learning, and instructional leadership, in addition to student achievement growth.

These accountability measures are designed to illustrate what effectiveness looks and sounds like and invest teacher leaders in the success of classroom teachers they support. They also ensure that teacher leaders are providing real value to the team members they support.

Budgeting for Teacher Leader Roles

NIET’s partner districts use a variety of funding sources to support teacher leadership roles, including federal and state funds. Our partners have found they can support teacher leadership roles when state or federal funds are not available if they make strategic use of existing resources.

Natchitoches Parish School Board, Louisiana



DeSoto Parish Schools, Louisiana



Many districts have existing leadership roles, such as Instructional Coach or Department Chair, that they transition into a master teacher position. Similarly, many school systems have the flexibility within their salary system to provide stipends for master and mentor teachers. Budgeting tools can help district leaders identify what will work within their existing budget.¹⁰

This model also creates budget savings by increasing retention, and enabling districts to reduce the cost of recruiting new staff. In TAP schools, teacher intent to return is 12% higher than in similar schools.¹¹ By reducing turnover, TAP enables districts to reduce the cost of recruiting new staff. With recruitment costing districts roughly three times the salary of a given position, this results in substantial savings.

For example, in a school with 100 teachers, a 10% increase in retention means 10 teachers return who might otherwise have left in a given year. The cost of recruiting a replacement is estimated at \$25,000.¹² In this school, retaining ten additional teachers would save approximately \$25,000 per teacher or \$250,000 total per year. If the school had approximately six master teachers earning a stipend of \$15,000 and 12 mentor teachers earning a stipend of \$5,000, the total cost of teacher leader stipends would be \$150,000 per year, which is below the \$250,000 savings gained from increased retention.

When there is turnover in school and district leadership, the career ladder prepares others to step into a leadership role from within the team. This creates savings in terms of recruitment for leadership positions, while also resulting in greater stability, coherence, and continuity.

Technology That Optimizes Educator Roles and Time: Provide access to resources that support individual teacher reflection and growth.

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It's powerful to watch another teacher use an instructional strategy and then be able to analyze what was effective or where I can improve. EE PASS lets me access videos of one-on-one instructional coaching and videos of classroom lessons to do my own learning.

— Jessica Carmean, Master Teacher at Jefferson Parish Schools, Louisiana

Teachers report that observing effective instruction helps them to improve, but it is difficult to schedule time to visit other classrooms. An online portal with videos of classroom lessons, such as NIET's Educator Effectiveness Preparation & Support System (EE PASS), offers access to examples of classroom practice and coaching sessions.

Several of NIET's state partners have created video libraries accessible to all teachers in their state, including Texas and Louisiana. Teachers use these videos to see effective practices in action, reflect on their own practices, and identify where they might improve. In addition, watching a video of a lesson and debriefing afterward can lead to deeper conversations between a teacher and a coach.

Access to videos of lessons, with evaluator ratings and evidence collected using a research-based instructional rubric, along with post-conference coaching sessions, gives teachers even more resources to share ideas and grow

their professional practice. When leadership team members or coaches want to explain a concept like rigor or student ownership of learning, access to video clips of highly effective classroom lessons facilitates conversations. EE PASS also facilitates the analysis and use of data on teacher effectiveness to plan professional learning, provide individual coaching, and inform decisions about teacher placement and promotion.

Using An Evidence-Based Instructional Rubric

An online video library enables teachers and leaders to strengthen their understanding of what high-quality instructional practices look like in the classroom. As districts adopt and implement high-quality instructional materials, supporting teachers to understand the new content is essential. It is equally important to support teachers in adjusting their instructional practices that are necessary to implement the curricula and to engage all students in grade-level learning. The rubric helps teachers understand specific instructional actions that directly impact student engagement and learning.

Using technology to give teachers a deeper understanding of an evidence-based instructional rubric like the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric, builds a common language around strong instruction and improves the transfer of skills and knowledge from professional learning teams to classrooms.

Perry Township Schools, Indiana



STRATEGIC STAFFING IN ACTION: SPOTLIGHT ON GADSDEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT #32, ARIZONA

[Gadsden Elementary School District #32](#), located in San Luis, Arizona, on the U.S./Mexico border, educates about 5,100 students. The district serves a unique and diverse community, with 100% of students qualifying for free- or reduced-price lunch and 98% of students entering the district enrolling as English language learners.

Historically, Gadsden's student results were consistently below expectations, and the district struggled to attract and retain educators.

High turnover, especially in the principalship, undermined district improvement strategies.

This all began to change in 2010 when the district partnered with NIET to introduce the TAP System as its strategic staffing model, designed to build instructional capacity and develop a stable leadership pipeline.



Adopting a Team-Based Approach

Through the TAP System, Gadsden has adopted *distributed leadership* that is built around two formal, instructionally-focused teacher leadership roles in each school. In Gadsden schools, master and mentor teachers are given dedicated release time to carry out their teacher leadership responsibilities. Additionally, the teacher leaders' expertise, time, and effort are recognized with *compensation that is differentiated* between the master and mentor roles.

Creating master and mentor teacher roles in Gadsden has *extended the reach* of some of the district's most effective teachers as they are now able to impact instruction beyond their own classrooms. The teacher leaders facilitate weekly professional learning for small teams of teachers for one to two hours every week.

Schools organize these teams by content or grade level to allow for meaningful collaboration and time to learn and develop strategies for immediate application in their classrooms.



This *innovative teaming structure* has been especially helpful in introducing high-quality instructional materials and strategies that support teachers to steadily improve their practice. The teacher collaborative teams create shared ownership of student learning and bring a range of expertise to support students.

For example, master teachers will field test learning strategies in the classrooms of novice teachers or teachers with larger numbers of students below grade level. The district's teaming structure brings additional high-level instructional expertise into classrooms regularly and strengthens support for individual students with greater needs.

Using Technology to Individualize and Extend Learning

Gadsden's shift to teaming structures and distributed leadership began to result in a culture change. School leaders, teacher leaders, and classroom teachers now collaborated to develop and implement instructional strategies, but they soon realized that technology could be utilized to strengthen their practices even further. Gadsden introduced NIET's web-based platform, the Educator Effectiveness Preparation and Support System (EE PASS) to illustrate specific instructional skills.

EE PASS is used in multiple ways by teachers and school leaders to *optimize their roles and time*. First, it is a way to show teachers what an instructional skill, like grouping or questioning, looks like in a highly effective teacher's classroom.

This helps teachers and leaders build a common language to describe strong instructional practices and a shared understanding of terms like "student ownership of learning." In addition, EE PASS is used by school leadership teams to calibrate their own understanding of high-level instructional practices and create consistency in the feedback they provide to teachers.

Creating a Pipeline of Instructional Experts

With their investment in teacher leadership roles, Gadsden has created a leadership development program that results in school and district leaders with strong instructional leadership skills.

As of the 2024-25 school year, six of the eight principals in Gadsden are former master teachers. "In Gadsden, we have learned that the best principals come from our master teacher roles," said Rio Colorado Elementary School principal Bethany Loucks. "The leadership skills they learn in that role put them head and shoulders above other candidates for the principalship. This enables us to grow our own leaders who already have strong connections to our community and a track record of success with our students."

This strategic staffing model *intentionally creates a pipeline of educators* with instructional expertise who are ready to step into school leadership. The experience of serving as a master teacher strengthens the principal's ability to provide each teacher with feedback for improvement grounded in the curriculum and standards for student learning. Their instructional knowledge and skills bring this perspective into district-level decision-making.



The TAP System's Strategic Staffing Structures Get Results

Five schools in Gadsden, which had never before earned an "A" rating, achieved this milestone during the 2018-19 school year. These improvements were sustained, a testament to the effectiveness of a focus on teacher leadership as a core improvement strategy. Over the past two years, since Arizona began issuing district letter grades, Gadsden has consistently received a "B" rating.

From 2021 to 2024, the district improved its performance on state assessments by 9 points in English language arts and 13 points in math, further closing achievement gaps with the state.

Gadsden historically faced challenges that were deeply systemic and required bold and creative solutions. The district's response – a comprehensive staffing solution centered on teacher leadership roles – provides professional growth opportunities for teachers and instructional excellence across the entire district.

CONCLUSION

Strategic staffing with teacher leadership roles improves instruction and builds effective, sustainable systems for long-term school improvement within existing budgets.

Strategic staffing built around teacher leadership roles solves many challenges at once: expanding instructional leadership and distributing leadership in school buildings; reliably observing or evaluating teaching and providing more frequent and useful feedback to teachers; greatly improving the relevance and effectiveness of professional learning; creating pipelines to leadership roles; increasing teacher retention; and, ultimately, accelerating student learning.

The TAP System’s model for building collaborative teams of teachers led by teacher leaders shows that strategic staffing can have an impact across many different school and district contexts. Research studies demonstrate both district-level and statewide academic gains and higher graduation rates.

Strategic staffing is a highly cost-effective, proven strategy to enable school systems to achieve much better results with their current staff and budget resources.

Orangeburg County School District, South Carolina



ENDNOTES

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