



Creating a Foundation for Success: Establishing the TAP System to Support Educators

Research Brief | Fall 2024

The Challenge

Research consistently documents that teachers and school leaders (henceforth, educators) are the most important school-based factors influencing student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Lee & Mamerow, 2019). Yet, across the country, high-need schools, which benefit the most from having effective educators, face challenges in attracting, developing, and retaining effective educators (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). High levels of educator turnover drain valuable resources and make it difficult to build a high-performing, stable faculty, which has detrimental effects on student performance (Bartanen et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). Addressing these challenges requires a schoolwide effort to develop and sustain a support system to continuously improve instructional practices and address the changing needs of students and educators.

The Solution

In the fall of 2021, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) began partnering with districts in Texas to create a sustainable system for continuous improvement of instruction and learning. All schools in the partner districts are considered high-need, as they serve a high proportion of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These schools are working to accelerate student learning to recover from the pandemic. The goals of the partnership are to increase educator effectiveness and improve student achievement. The partnership, Texas IMPACT (Improving Management Systems for Principals and Classroom Teachers), is supported by a Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program grant. The U.S. Department of Education initiated the TSL program to assist high-need education systems in implementing, improving, or expanding their overall human capital management system (HCMS), which must include a performance-based compensation system. As part of the partnership, the districts are enhancing their HCMS by implementing the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP System), which has been shown to improve instruction and student outcomes (e.g., Cohodes et al., 2023; Eren, 2019; Leutscher et al., 2024; Logis et al., 2022).



The TAP System

The TAP System is an educator effectiveness reform model focused on attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining high-quality educators through its four elements of success: multiple career paths, ongoing applied professional growth, instructionally focused accountability, and performance-based compensation. The TAP System promotes teacher collaboration, improves instructional practice, and builds the school leadership capacity to improve student achievement.



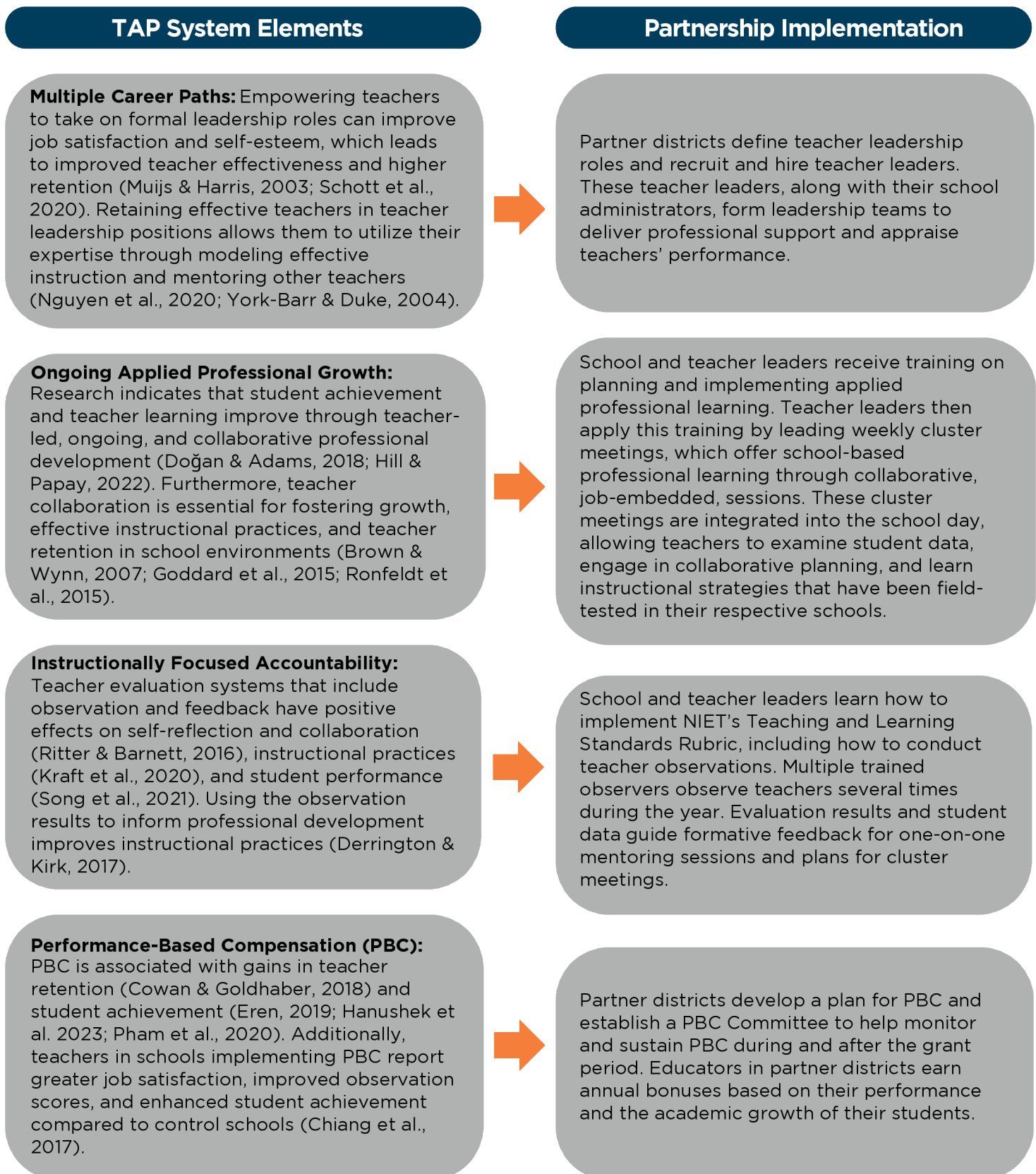
Evidence of the Impact of the TAP System

Evidence shows that NIET's TAP System enhances educator effectiveness, boosts educator retention, and improves student outcomes. This impact is observable both during the initial grant implementation phase and the subsequent sustained implementation period. Studies conducted during the grant implementation phase, such as those by Leutscher and Barnett (2020) and Logis et al. (2022), have reported an increase in the percentage of effective teachers and their retention in TAP System schools. Additionally, research by Hudgens and Barnett (2017) highlights the TAP System's role in improving school administrators' retention and effectiveness over time. Furthermore, studies by Mann et al. (2013), Schacter and Thum (2005), and Springer et al. (2014) have indicated advancements in student performance attributable to the TAP System. After the grant-funded phase, Leutscher et al. (2024) found continued improvement in student performance in TAP System schools, surpassing matched comparison schools. Findings by Cohodes et al. (2023) also indicate long-term benefits for students exposed to the TAP System, including improved educational attainment and reduced involvement in criminal activities and government assistance dependency in early adulthood.

Texas IMPACT

In the 2021-22 school year, when the grant partnership began, the three partner districts enrolled between 1,200 and 4,000 students and served communities ranging from suburban to rural. Between 76% and 93% of the students in each district were from economically disadvantaged households, and between 53% and 93% of students in each district identify as persons of color. Between 40% and 57% of teachers in the partner districts had 10 years of experience or less, compared to 55% statewide. The average years of experience of teachers with the partner districts (6.3 years across the three districts combined) was lower than the statewide figure (7.2 years). The average years of experience of principals with the districts (5.2 years across the three districts combined) was also lower compared with the statewide figure (5.4 years). Figure 1 illustrates how all partner districts are fully implementing the TAP System during the grant partnership, showcasing the implementation of each element.

Figure 1. Implementation of the TAP System During the Grant Partnership

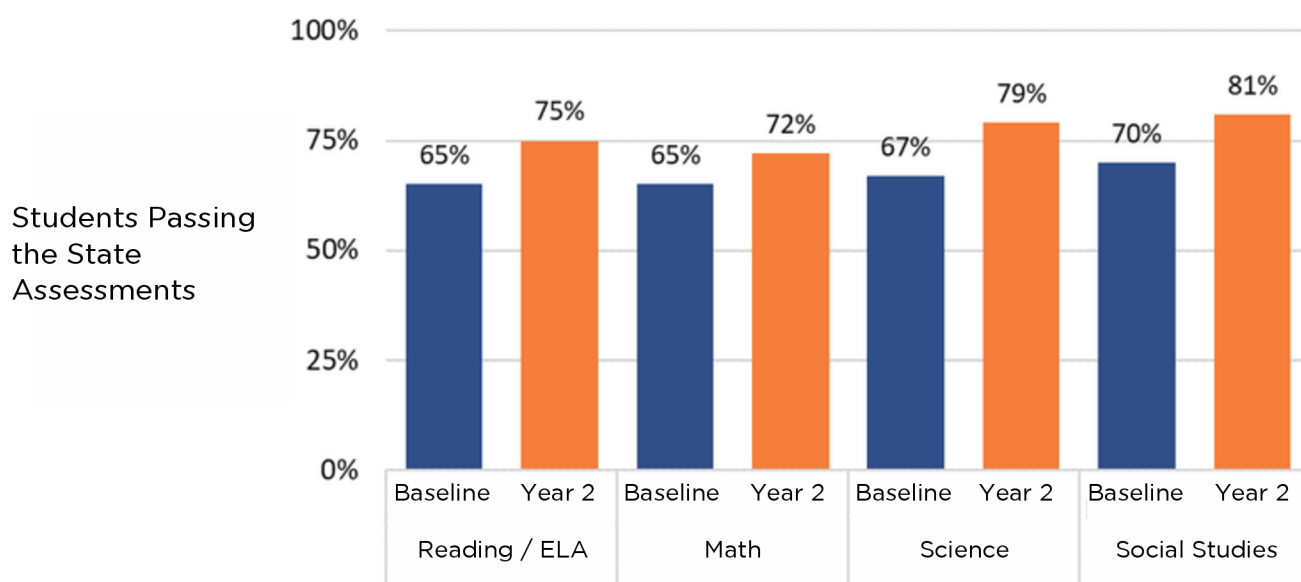


Year 2 Findings

By the end of the second grant year (Year 2, 2022-23), 90% of classroom teachers' observations scores across the districts were above the level of meeting the expectations of delivering well-designed instruction (i.e., effective instruction). Among school leaders, 91% received observation scores above the effectiveness benchmark.

Students appeared to benefit from this strengthened teacher workforce. Across all partner districts, there was an improvement in the percentage of students passing the state assessments in all tested subjects from prior to the grant (i.e., baseline, 2020-21) to Year 2 (see Figure 2). Moreover, students in partner districts showed greater improvements in reading/ELA, science, and social studies compared to statewide student performance.

Figure 2. Texas IMPACT Districts Improve Performance in all Tested Subjects From Baseline to Year 2.



Additionally, the data reveal that 89% of effective classroom teachers and 93% of effective school leaders from Year 2 were retained into Year 3 by their respective districts. These retention rates indicate a positive trend for the continuity of effective teaching practices and leadership, implying a promising outlook for sustained positive student outcomes. Details on teacher and school leader effectiveness, student performance measures, and the process for determining educator retention are available in the Technical Appendix.

Conclusion

TAP System implementation provides districts with an educator effectiveness reform model that focuses on supportive structures for teachers and school leaders. This approach has been shown to be highly effective for improving student achievement (Park et al., 2019). The positive impact of the TAP System can be attributed to its four elements: multiple career paths, ongoing applied professional growth, instructionally focused accountability, and performance-based compensation, which both individually and as a system have been shown to promote educator and student outcomes (Cohodes et al., 2023; Leutscher et al., 2024; Logis et al., 2022).

The grant has helped partner districts lay a strong foundation for success through establishing formal teacher leadership roles in their schools and building the school leadership teams' capacity to improve teacher instruction and student learning. By the end of Year 2, the partnership witnessed a strengthened teacher workforce and improvements in student performance. Moreover, there were notable retention rates among effective teachers and school leaders from Year 2 to Year 3, indicating a favorable prospect for sustained positive student outcomes. By creating and developing the system and structures of the TAP System, teachers can grow, collaborate, and advance along a career path, which leads to improved educator effectiveness and better opportunities and outcomes for students.



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Technical Appendix

Teacher Effectiveness. In the TAP System, a teacher receives an annual evaluation score known as a Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibility (SKR) score. The score is obtained through multiple teacher observation ratings conducted by administrators and teacher leaders certified in using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and a responsibility survey, which assesses a teachers' job responsibilities and is completed by the teacher leaders for each career teacher. The SKR score is calculated as a weighted average of the observation ratings and responsibility survey indicators. SKR scores range from 1.0 (unsatisfactory performance) to 5.0 (exemplary performance). An overall score of 3.0 or higher (the benchmark for the current analysis) signifies effective performance, indicating that teachers meet or exceed expectations for delivering well-designed instruction. To assess the partnership's impact on teacher effectiveness, the percentage of teachers attaining an SKR score of 3.0 or higher is examined.

School Leader Effectiveness. At the beginning of the school year, the school leader and their evaluator, typically a district administrator, plan a year-long observation and data collection process to measure school leader effectiveness. This process includes assessing the school leader's practices, establishing performance goals, collecting and analyzing information, and providing constructive feedback. At the end of the year, the evaluator's score from this process is combined with survey results from teachers and the school leader's self-assessment to generate a summative observation score. The score is on a 1-to-5 scale, with 3.0 or higher considered effective. To assess the partnership's impact on school leader effectiveness, the percentage of school leaders attaining a score of 3.0 or higher is examined.

Student Performance. To assess student performance, the study examines districtwide state assessment results from baseline year (i.e., the year prior to the grant) to the second year of the grant (2022-23). The performance measures are the percentage of students performing at "Approaches Grade Level or Above" – the passing standard for the state assessments – on each tested subject (English/reading, mathematics, science, and social studies) across all grades.

Effective Educator Retention. To assess the retention of effective educators, the educator roster from each partner district for a given grant year is filtered to identify effective educators. If these educators appear in the following school year's beginning-of-year educator roster, they are considered retained by the district, regardless of whether they change positions (i.e., the district retained its human capital).