

BUILDING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE TAP SYSTEM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. What is TAP?

TAP™: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) was developed in 1999 by education reform pioneer Lowell Milken as a bold, comprehensive school-reform model designed to attract, retain, develop and motivate talented people to the teaching profession. TAP™ provides powerful opportunities for career advancement, professional growth, instructionally-focused accountability and competitive compensation for educators. The TAP System addresses the most important element in a school – human capital – and it does so by working with educators to systematically increase their skills and thereby increase student achievement. TAP, NIET’s flagship program, is currently operating in 11 states in partnership with sponsoring agencies such as state departments of education and/or public and private school districts and schools. To learn more about TAP at the national level, visit www.tapsystem.org.



2. What is NIET?

Created in 2005, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) is an independent public charity that supports and manages the implementation of the TAP system nationally. NIET works to ensure TAP’s effectiveness and sustainability in schools located in diverse communities across the nation. Building on more than a decade of experience in implementing teacher effectiveness reforms in schools across the country, NIET most recently created the *Best Practices Center* to provide services and support to schools, districts and states in developing highly effective educators. To learn more about NIET, visit www.niet.org.

3. What are the four key elements of TAP?

Through the implementation of TAP’s four interrelated key elements, teachers are improving their instruction and the achievement of their students. The four key elements of TAP are:

- » **Multiple Career Paths:** for educators as career, mentor and master teachers,
- » **Ongoing Applied Professional Growth:** through weekly cluster meetings, follow-up support in the classroom and coaching,
- » **Instructionally-Focused Accountability:** through multiple classroom observations and evaluations utilizing a research-based instrument and rubric that identified effective teaching practices, and
- » **Performance-Based Compensation:** based on multiple measures of performance, including student achievement gains and teachers’ instructional practices.

4. How does TAP differ from other reform programs?

TAP represents the longest sustained and most successful effort to radically transform teacher evaluation using multiple measures, including student achievement gains, in the United States today. In contrast to some reform efforts that focus on a particular area of improvement, the goal of the TAP System is to draw more talented people to the teaching profession—and keep them there—by making it more attractive and rewarding to be a teacher. TAP was developed after the Milken Family Foundation recognized the need for a multi-faceted strategy that restructures schools in order to improve the teaching profession. TAP offers teachers and school leaders a thriving learning environment with powerful opportunities to receive support and excel, while holding them accountable for their performance.

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5. How does TAP afford teachers the opportunity to advance in their careers?

TAP allows teachers to pursue a variety of positions throughout their careers — career, mentor and master teacher — depending upon their interests, abilities and accomplishments. As teachers move up the ranks, their qualifications, roles and responsibilities increase — and so does their compensation. This allows good teachers to advance professionally without having to leave the classroom. It also creates expert teacher leaders within schools to provide support to other teachers.

6. How are teachers in TAP schools engaged in professional development?

TAP provides teachers with a system of professional development that is ongoing, job-embedded, collaborative, student centered and led by expert instructors. TAP *restructures* the school schedule to provide time during the regular school day for all teachers to meet, learn, plan, mentor and share with other teachers. This common time allows teachers to constantly improve the quality of their instruction and hence increase their students’ academic achievement. Further, teachers learn new instructional strategies and have greater opportunities to collaborate, both of which enable them to become more effective teachers.

7. How are teachers in TAP schools evaluated?

TAP has developed a comprehensive system for evaluating teachers outlined in the *TAP Teaching Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibilities (SKR) Performance Standards*, otherwise known as the *TAP Instructional Rubric*. The *TAP Instructional Rubric* is a set of clearly defined standards that promote best practices and apply to all content areas. Teachers are well-prepared for their evaluations through multiple training opportunities on the TAP rubric and through TAP’s continuous professional “cluster group” meetings.

Each teacher is evaluated four (4) times a year by multiple evaluators (including principals, assistant principals, master teachers, and mentor teachers) who are trained and certified according to these standards. All evaluations are followed up with a post-conference sessions between the observed teacher and the evaluator to discuss specific reinforcements and refinements based on the instructional rubric, which is intended to help the teacher strengthen his/her instructional practices.



8. How is TAP’s performance-pay system different from “merit pay” programs tried in the past?

“Merit-pay” commonly refers to programs tried in the 1980s and 1990s, many of which were viewed as unfair because of the measures that were used to determine additional teacher pay. Some programs rewarded teachers based only on end-of-year test scores, giving an advantage to teachers with students were already identified as “high-achievers.” Other programs based awards on a single classroom visit by the principal, may have led to accusations of bias and favoritism.

This contrasts starkly with TAP, considered a “comprehensive performance-pay” system, because it is based on *fair, multiple* measures of teacher performance. Measures include both student achievement growth analyzed by a value-added model at the individual classroom and school-wide level and multiple classroom evaluations conducted by multiple certified evaluators.

9. How does performance pay in TAP schools work?

TAP provides additional compensation to teachers based on new roles and responsibilities, their accomplishments in the classroom and the performance of their students. As a result, teacher salaries are determined by more than years of teaching experience and professional development credits. Salary augmentations are given to master and mentor teachers because these teachers take on more responsibility and authority, and work a longer school year than the typical classroom teacher.

All teachers in TAP schools are eligible for performance-based compensation awards based upon the average of the scores they earn on multiple evaluations of their classroom teaching, as well as their classroom-level achievement growth and school-level achievement growth, both of which are measured using a value-added model.

10. What is the benefit of providing teachers and administrators with performance-based compensation?

For too long, excellence in teaching has not been recognized or rewarded. By offering multiple ways for teachers and principals to demonstrate excellence and to be recognized for outstanding work, TAP builds a culture of excellence in schools. While some argue that differentiating compensation based on performance could be divisive, teachers in TAP schools demonstrate increased levels of collegiality over time.

11. What is Louisiana TAP?

Initiated in 2003 as a grass roots effort in five schools in the state, Louisiana TAP has become a major state reform and priority of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) to improve teacher and leader quality and student achievement. Through its partnership with NIET and district/school partnerships, Louisiana TAP seeks to leverage TAP to benefit schools and students in the state. To learn more about Louisiana TAP, visit www.louisianaschools.net/divisions/tap/.

12. What is Louisiana TIF?

In 2010, the Louisiana Department of Education became one of sixty-two entities from across the country to receive a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. TAP serves as the foundation of the Louisiana TIF grant to accomplish its goals of 1) increasing the percent of effective educators, 2) improving student achievement, and 3) sustaining a performance-based compensation system within its eight partner districts (Ascension Parish, DeSoto Parish, East Feliciana Parish, Jefferson Parish, Pointe Coupee Parish, St. Mary Parish, Tangipahoa Parish, and West Baton Rouge Parish). Over the course of the five-year TIF grant, it is anticipated that approximately 2,800 educators and 33,500 students will be impacted.

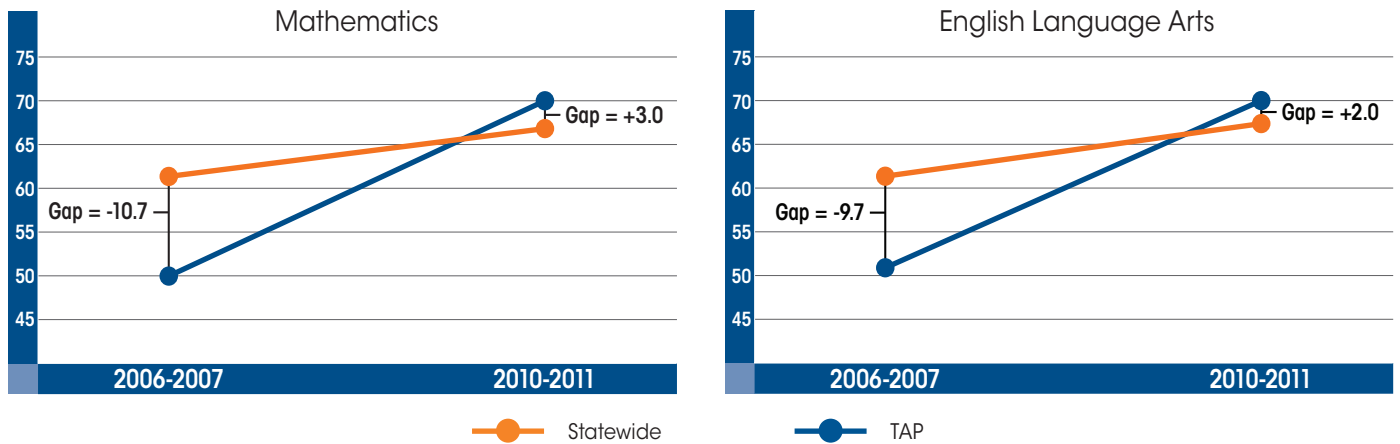
13. Where is TAP being implemented in Louisiana?

During 2011-12, TAP was implemented in more than eighty (80) schools across the state. To access a list of current TAP schools in Louisiana or to apply to become a Louisiana TAP school, visit <http://www.louisianaschools.net/divisions/tap/>.

14. What impact has TAP had on students in Louisiana schools?

Students in Louisiana TAP schools have gained in student achievement faster than the state average, closing achievement gaps in math and English Language Arts, while serving a higher-minority, higher-poverty population of students as compared to the statewide average. The below charts show ten (10) Louisiana schools which implemented TAP continuously over a five-year period from 2006-2011, versus the state average for the same five-year period. Louisiana TAP schools reversed an achievement gap of nearly 11 points below the state to 3 points above the state in math, and of nearly 10 points below the state to 2 points above the state in English Language Arts.

Percent of Students Scoring *Basic* or Above



15. What impact has TAP had on principals in their role as the school's instructional leaders?

TAP utilizes a shared instructional leadership model called the TAP Leadership Team which is comprised of the principal, assistant principals, and master and mentor teachers. This team works together to develop and lead cluster group meetings (i.e., professional learning communities), formulate school goals based on student data and implement a school plan to reach those goals.

This collaborative structure makes it easier for principals to provide outstanding instructional leadership by distributing their instructional responsibilities across a team of exemplary teacher and administrative leaders. Further, this shared leadership creates a new, dynamic learning community among the faculty where educators help and teach each other.

16. Where can I learn more about frequently asked questions about Louisiana TAP?

Additional frequently asked questions are available on the Department's website at www.louisianaschools.net/divisions/tap/.