



Texas TAP FAQ

1) **What is TAP™: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement?**

TAP™ is a comprehensive, research-based and nationally proven school reform model that seeks to improve teacher instruction and student achievement. Lowell Milken, chairman and co-founder of the Milken Family Foundation, introduced TAP in 1999 as an effective way to attract, develop, motivate and retain talented people to the teaching profession. The system is now operated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET). TAP is based on four interrelated elements: multiple career paths, ongoing applied professional development, instructionally focused accountability and performance-based compensation.

2) **How are schools selected to participate in Texas TAP?**

Across the nation, schools are invited by state departments of education or district superintendents to learn about the system and apply to become TAP schools. In Texas, the Institute for Public School Initiatives, part of The University of Texas at Austin, oversees Texas TAP and manages the application process.

Application to TAP is competitive. Schools are selected through a process by which they are evaluated on their need and readiness, with contributing criteria including teacher qualifications; experience and turnover; student attendance and achievement; and leadership capacity. In order for schools to be eligible to participate in the system, they must have a majority faculty vote.

3) **How does Texas TAP help increase student achievement?**

Research shows the most important school-related factor in student achievement is having a high-quality teacher in the classroom. Texas TAP helps educators focus on academics and better teaching techniques, building upon the foundation of the school's instructional program – state academic standards, curriculum and testing.

By creating a shared understanding and a common language to discuss effective teaching, TAP enables educators to work together to make measurable improvements in teaching and learning. As a result, TAP teachers and schools produce higher student achievement growth than their non-TAP counterparts.

4) **How does TAP measure student achievement?**

TAP measures student performance based on value-added achievement growth – gains a student makes over time – rather than a snapshot of his or her performance on a single standardized test. This methodology offers a way to estimate the impact schools and teachers have on student learning isolated from other contributing factors such as socioeconomic background.

5) **What impact has TAP had on teacher recruitment and retention? How does the TAP system motivate teachers?**



All educators pursue classroom teaching with the intent and motivation to help students learn, but they often are not given the tools and support system to meet those goals. TAP provides ongoing applied professional development sessions for all teachers. These sessions, along with individual coaching, offer frequent opportunities to collaborate and share best practices with colleagues.

Under the TAP system, outstanding teachers can also earn higher salaries and advance professionally, just as in other careers. In addition, TAP provides the opportunities for teachers to pursue increased responsibilities and leadership positions in the format of mentor or master teachers. As a mentor or master teacher, a selected individual becomes TAP-certified and is trained to coach teachers and monitor progress of the TAP school plan. Further, teachers are provided these opportunities without leaving the classroom, where they are needed most.

6) What kind of professional development do Texas TAP teachers receive?

Texas TAP's ongoing applied professional growth enables teachers to become active agents of their own improvement. Each teacher works in cooperation with mentor or master teachers to develop an Individual Growth Plan (IGP). In addition, each belongs to a professional learning group called a cluster group. Mentor or master teachers within the school lead these cluster sessions, which focus on teacher collaboration for instructional improvement.

Both IGP and cluster group work help teachers meet student learning needs by connecting research-based, data-driven best practices to daily classroom instruction. Both types of sessions are embedded in the school's daily schedule.

TAP teachers are also supported in the classroom through regular follow-up activities including lesson demonstrations, modeling, team-teaching, observation and reflective feedback.

7) How does performance pay work?

Performance-based compensation is just one of the elements of TAP. In most TAP schools, the basic salary schedule remains in place. Salary augmentations are given to mentor or master teachers for their increased levels of responsibility and work. TAP recommends augmentations of \$5,000 – \$12,000 for mentor teachers and \$10,000 – \$20,000 for master teachers, depending on school and district budgets.

All TAP teachers are eligible for performance bonuses based upon their professional practices – as assessed by multiple, certified TAP evaluators – as well as their students' academic achievements and the school's overall academic progress during the school year. Unlike an across-the-board pay raise, this system rewards teachers for measurable improvements in their teaching skills and their students' achievement, as well as for additional roles and responsibilities.

Most TAP administrators are also eligible for performance pay. The most commonly used measures to determine additional pay are school-wide achievement gains and the quality of TAP implementation.



8) Many factors outside the classroom affect student learning. How does Texas TAP provide teachers with equal opportunity to earn bonuses?

Texas TAP is based on the premise that all children can learn – regardless of external factors and socioeconomic conditions – which is why classroom gains are measured through value-added growth, rather than reaching a specific attainment level. This means that regardless of where their students start the year academically, teachers are evaluated and rewarded based upon how much their students improve, not by the percentage of students that “meet” or “exceed” on standardized tests.

9) How are TAP teachers evaluated?

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

Each teacher is evaluated four to six times a year by multiple evaluators (including principals, assistant principals, master teachers and sometimes mentor teachers) who are trained and certified according to these standards. Some of the evaluations are announced, and some are unannounced. All evaluations are followed up with a post-conference session between the observed teacher and the evaluator to discuss specific reinforcements and refinements based on the instructional rubric intended to help the teacher strengthen his or her instructional practice.

10) How are teachers selected for leadership roles?

Applicants go through a rigorous selection process that includes meeting basic qualifications and demonstrating expertise in learning and instruction, curriculum development, assessment and leadership. Applicants are also expected to have a record of demonstrated student achievement. A staffing committee of administrators (both internal and external) and teachers participates in the selection process and advises the principal, who makes the final selections from the pool of qualified candidates.

11) What are the responsibilities of career, mentor and master teachers? What are the differences among the three positions?

The career teacher is most similar to what we now think of as a traditional classroom teacher. The primary difference between the role of the career teacher in the TAP model and the role of the traditional teacher is that the career teacher routinely teams with more experienced mentor and master teachers. This team-teaching environment provides necessary support to the career teacher and builds an induction program into the staffing system. The career teacher also collaborates on lesson planning and develops expertise in all areas of instruction by working directly with mentor and master teachers.

Mentor teachers are actively involved in enhancing and supporting the teaching experience of career teachers. Through the leadership team, they participate in analyzing student data and creating the schools' academic achievement plan. With



oversight and support from the master teacher, they lead cluster meetings, and as a result, mentor teachers provide classroom-based follow-up and extensive feedback on the instructional practices of career teachers. Planning for instruction is in partnership with other mentor and career teachers, with the input and guidance of the master teacher. Mentor teachers are required to engage in professional development activities that are both self- and team-directed.

Master teachers function in a unique manner relative to the traditional teacher. Their primary role is, with the principal, to analyze student data and create and institute an academic achievement plan for the school. Master teachers lead cluster groups (i.e., a professional learning community) and provide demonstration lessons, coaching and team teaching to career teachers. They also spend, on average, two hours per day teaching students. Master teachers collaborate to identify research-based instructional strategies to share with career teachers during cluster group meetings. They are partners with the principal in evaluating other teachers. Master teachers may also partner with the principal in sharing some of the responsibility of interacting with parents.

12) How much does it cost to implement TAP? How is the system funded in Texas?

The cost of TAP varies, ranging from \$250 to \$400 per student each year, depending on the infrastructure and funding already in place. Texas TAP schools have been funded by district or school management and operational budgets; state appropriations; federal funds through Title I, Title II and federal grants including the Teacher Incentive Fund; as well as foundation grants and local business funds.

13) What kind of support is available for schools participating in the system?

IPSI provides schools with proven processes and tools to structure and drive instructional change and student achievement. NIET also provides schools with formal and informal support. Texas TAP schools have the opportunity to participate in continuous training such as summits; monthly mentor and master teacher meetings; bi-monthly principal meetings; and on-site support and coaching from TAP national trainers and the local state team. There are also national conferences and summer institutes that provide participating principals and schools with additional support.

14) What can people do to join Texas TAP or learn more about the system?

Call 512-499-4512 or email Dr. Tammy Kreuz at tkreuz@utsystem.edu. You may also visit www.tapsystem.org for more information.