May 2015

Using TAP To Be Strategic

Marion High School's Chris Walker and Anna Murphy, assistant principals, use a TAP Leadership Team (TLT) meeting to work on their school plan and monitor progress, which might include analysis of student and teacher data, reviewing cluster operations, discussion of the evaluation process, or checking individual growth plans.

TAP Helps Marion H.S. Become an Indiana Grade A School

Marion High School (MHS) in Marion, Indiana began implementing the TAP System four years ago through a federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant and moved its state assigned grade from an F to an A after the first three TAP years. In fact, Principal Keith Burke said MHS’s scores have gone up in every area. “We are most proud of a graduation rate of over 95 percent. That number was 58 percent just six years ago.”

Assistant Principal Anna Murphy said TAP has helped provide teachers and principals with a focused system that works. “It uses best practices and accountability along with incentives for our teachers and administration. The support from TAP has been great, and the school bought in and came together to create a wonderful collaborative environment that is best for students.”

Marion’s ED Options Teacher Clint Davis said that through the TAP System he has been able to adapt school-wide improvement strategies to his classroom. “VTS (Virtual Thinking Strategy) allowed students to think about what they were viewing and make assessment when answering the questions posed. SOLVE (problem
solving strategy) allowed students to solve varied problems given in my PLATO lab and achieve proficient status at all levels.”

MHS administrators named the TAP elements they found most important to the school’s improvement:

- Support from master and mentor teachers is instrumental to career teachers, especially new teachers.
- The TAP rubric guides teachers into creating more detailed instructional plans that focus on standards and learning objectives. That rubric provides the foundation that helps teachers learn and use field-tested “best practices” for teaching content and managing their classrooms.
- An effective leadership team focused on school-wide goals and top priorities is vital to the students and the school.
- The evaluation and professional development pieces are also key. Four formal evaluations a year, frequent walk-through visits, and weekly professional development creates an environment of good teaching and increased student achievement.

The TAP Leadership Team (TLT) is a big part of the school’s transformation “because it gives us the forum to plan and address our challenges. TLT is our very own professional development time used to equip ourselves with knowledge,” said Murphy.

Administrators admit that the time commitment and buy-in were the biggest challenges to TAP implementation; however, the quick improvement helped. Burke said, “The fact that we went from an F school to an A school played the biggest part in overcoming the challenges because it was proof that our hard work was paying off.”

**Teacher Leadership Is Key**

Teacher leadership and related growth opportunities are important elements in the success of TAP schools and help equip schools to reach their student achievement goals. TAP founder Lowell Milken stated:

“We must be able to put in place models in which teachers can grow professionally to reach their potential. Teacher leaders are the best drivers of this change because of their demonstrated strengths connecting reflective practice to student learning growth. Teacher leaders are the key to shaping and implementing the requisite evaluation
and support models that translate high expectations into effective instructional practices in every classroom.”

Teacher Leader Path Helps Liz Martin Grow at Goshen Middle School

"Teacher leadership opportunities allow dedicated educators an avenue to become an integral part of discovering solutions to the problems their schools face," said master teacher Liz Martin from Goshen Middle School in Goshen, Indiana.

In her sixth year of teaching, Martin has participated in and appreciates the different roles the TAP System has provided her - first as a career teacher, then mentor teacher, and now master teacher. She says working at a high-need school is tough, and she admits early on as a career teacher that she needed the support of others. "I relied on other teacher leaders to be a voice for our work in the classroom as my school made collective decisions on how to support students." However, after a few years, "I was ready to add my voice to the decision-making for how we address the challenges of our students . . . I wanted to be involved with finding solutions to help our students grow, and the leadership opportunities of mentor and master teachers have allowed me to do this."

Martin says that as a career teacher, she received professional development through TAP cluster meetings and classroom support. She learned how her classroom instruction impacted overall student achievement and put her unique touches on school strategies to engage her specific students. As a mentor teacher, she observed teaching in her school, provided feedback, helped tweak lessons, recognized good teaching, shared those ideas with others, and contributed to leadership team plans to raise achievement. As a master teacher, she does action research to determine school-wide student needs

Goshen Middle School Stats:

- 67% of students qualify for free or reduced lunches
- 56% minority student body
- 1,485 students in grades 6, 7, and 8
- Improved two state letter grades since implementing TAP in 2011
- Goshen Community Schools district went from D to B in state grades since TAP implementation in 2011

Source: Ind. Dept. of Education

"Teaching with the TAP rubric has changed my thinking about instruction. I now set all students up for success through guided practice, opportunities to teach other students, checks for understanding through academic feedback, and grouping with a purpose."

Mindy Park, Career Teacher West Goshen Elementary
and develops plans to address them through staff training and follow-up coaching.

Putting teachers in leadership roles is key because they are “the single closest connection to student learning on a day-to-day basis. They have a pulse on the level of learning in their classrooms every day,” said Martin. “Larger, school-wide decisions about professional development and instructional strategies need to be informed by and through classroom teachers.”

To learn more about teacher leadership within the TAP System, click here.

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**Research:**

**Case Study Demonstrates Benefits of Teacher Leadership**

A recent case study in two Iowa school districts highlighted the positive impact of teacher leadership opportunities available through the TAP System. This study describes how building the capacity for teacher leadership and meaningful professional development can lead to better teacher and student outcomes. It also offers other powerful lessons for how teacher leaders can play a central role in instructional improvement. To read the study, Click Here.

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**Summer Training:**

**Indiana TAP CORE Training** - For all new TAP administrators, master teachers, and mentor teachers for the 2015-16 school year at the University of Indianapolis (unless otherwise noted):

- **TAP Overview, TAP Rubric Introduction, and Evaluation A:** July 16-17, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. EST
- **Cluster and the TAP Leadership Team:** July 23-24, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. EST
- **Field Testing:** CHOOSE ONE--July 29 (in Goshen, Indiana), August 7 (Indianapolis), OR September 2 (Indianapolis), 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. EST
- **Evaluation B, Evaluator Certification Assessment:** September 3-4, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. EST

Register Here.
Two-day workshop for Indiana TAP Leadership Teams -
June 22 from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. and June 23 from 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. at the
Sheraton North Keystone Crossing Hotel in Indianapolis.
Workshop topics include:

- Embedding Indiana's New Academic Standards into Key TAP Processes
- Teaching Different Types of Thinking in a Variety of Content Areas and Grade Levels
- Critical Elements for Purposefully Planning Cluster Cycle 1
- Exploring Effective Student Thinking Strategies (strategy "showcase" by grade span)
- TAP Principals Roundtable

Register Here.

National TAP Summer Institutes:

- Charleston, South Carolina: July 13-15 Register Here
- Phoenix, Arizona: July 20-22 Register Here

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