Planning is Key
With Vision Academy Principal Ian Yearwood jotting down ideas, first grade intervention teacher Brittany Denny (left) and master teacher Val Fouch (center) plan for TAP System Cluster Meetings using the 5 Steps for Effective Learning.

TAP System's strengths fill needs of Vision Academy's staff and students
Vision Academy at Riverside in Indianapolis is the most recent Indiana school to adopt the TAP System™ school improvement initiative. Principal Ian Yearwood and master teacher Valerie Fouch previously had leadership experience in other Indiana TAP schools and were drawn to TAP for Vision because of their firsthand knowledge of its effectiveness for improving teacher performance and student achievement.
Vision, in its second year of operation and first year with TAP, serves 376 students in grades K-7 with 44 staff members. “We’re a replication of Avondale Meadows Academy, which has been a TAP school for about five years,” said Principal Ian Yearwood. “We serve a student population of about 84 percent African American, 5 percent Latino, 8 percent biracial and 2 percent Caucasian.”

Both were at Vision last year, Yearwood as principal and Fouch as a fourth grade teacher. They say the TAP System has already impacted their teachers in a positive way. “Teachers have been commenting how supported they feel . . . Returning teachers from last year have stated how this school year has started off much better than last because they are getting the resources they need,” said Fouch.

“We value everyone in our building and we as a TLT (TAP Leadership Team) have committed ourselves to support everyone. . .” said Fouch, master teacher for grades 4-7. After their first TAP cluster meeting, she said that all teachers were effectively communicating student objectives written as “I can” statements, which was a strategy learned in the first cluster meeting.

Principal Yearwood points to the common language and best teaching practices as the most valuable elements that he thinks the TAP System brings to their school. “Last year we lacked consistency across the board, and teachers were not well supported,” he said. “This year we’re implementing weekly professional development through TAP clusters, and our master teachers have gotten into every single classroom each week of this school year.”

Fouch is most excited about the willingness of their staff to give TAP a try. She understands it is rigorous and thinks it takes a great staff to take on the extra work to integrate it into their classrooms. “Time is a precious thing for all teachers, and they are willing to give of themselves daily to help our students. I think it is remarkable,” said Fouch.

She has experienced the power of TAP as a master teacher in another school and can’t wait for the staff here to have the same opportunity. According to Fouch, “TAP will bring such a culture change to our building, and I can’t wait to see the impact on student achievement throughout our entire building. It’s going to be a ‘TAPifying’ year of proficiency. Here we go!”

"I have never in my 38 years of experience in education witnessed an initiative that has had such a dramatic impact on an instructional program as the TAP model has had on our
Callahan grows with TAP career pathways

*First career, then mentor, and now master teacher*

"Career pathway opportunities provide teachers with a deeper level of professional development and more opportunities to hone their craft," said Corrie Callahan, TAP master teacher at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School in Perry Township Schools in Indianapolis. Callahan has moved from a traditional classroom teacher (career teacher), to mentor teacher, and now to master teacher during her 12 years at her school.

Abraham Lincoln Elementary Principal Whitney Wilkowski described Callahan as a great asset to the leadership team. “She has really taken risks and encouraged others to learn new things as well, as she has developed into a master teacher who continuously strives to ensure that all students achieve to their greatest potential.”

Master teacher Corrie Callahan (standing) facilitates conversation with Perry Township’s Abraham Lincoln Elementary teachers about the appropriate number of words to teach second graders per week. Sharing their thoughts are Mindy Williams, Jessie Beretta and Staci Drake.

The TAP System, implemented at Abraham Lincoln Elementary for the past five years, 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 along with 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.

Callahan said being a career teacher challenged her to improve through TAP cluster meetings, follow-up, and evaluations. “I learned what good teaching is and how to implement that into my teaching in manageable ‘bites.’”

As a mentor, she took on a dual role and developed an even greater knowledge of
the TAP rubric. She said, “It’s amazing how much deeper my understanding became when I not only had to apply the rubric to my teaching but to identify it in another’s teaching.” She said the beauty of being a mentor teacher is that she’s in the trenches with the career teachers she coaches. “It is a tough and demanding role, but I think it really helped me to learn that true coaching is about meeting teachers where they are and helping them to get where they want to be. You have to really care about the people you’re coaching to do that.”

Having been in the trenches also helps her as a TAP master teacher. “I try to always remember the incredibly difficult load career teachers carry.” In her current role, she can put more time into research and best practices. “Classroom teachers have so much to do that it’s really great to be able to learn about what’s best for our kids and share that.”

Callahan said TAP is different than other school improvement approaches. “I see it kind of like a diet versus a lifestyle change. Other school improvement approaches are like diets. They are things that we implement for awhile, waiting for a change. They are also partial; they don’t address the overall need, just a small area. TAP is like a lifestyle change; it influences most of what we do in our school. It requires a long-term change in the way we think about what we do.”

Research snapshot explores value of teacher leadership roles, programs

A policy snapshot from the Center on Great Teachers & Leaders at the American Institute for Research talks about the value of teacher leaders as they share expertise, support growth of other teachers, and increase the quality of instruction. The snapshot summarizes literature about teacher leadership, covering its benefits and challenges as well as policy elements to help improve opportunities. It also highlights examples of specific teacher leadership programs.

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