

## Teacher Quality: Key to Student Success

### Introduction and Context

In a knowledge based economy that makes education more important than ever, teachers matter more than ever. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education are focused on teachers in the classroom as the key to meaningful school reform. Education research shows that teacher effectiveness is the difference maker – an influence even greater than race, poverty level, or parent's education.

Katie Haycock of The Education Trust notes: *“Research shows that kids who have two, three, or four strong teachers in a row will eventually excel, no matter what their background, while kids who have even two weak teachers in a row will never recover.”* The difference between having an effective teacher or ineffective teacher for three years in a row can represent as much as 50 percentage points in student achievement on a 100 point scale (Babu and Mendro, 2003).

The 2010 Global Strategy Group poll offered seven options on the best way to improve education in Louisiana. The citizens of Louisiana noted that their number one option was “holding teachers more accountable for their students’ progress.” Their number two options was “providing more support and professional development for teachers.”

Increasing teacher effectiveness in Louisiana requires a six part strategy:

- Attracting capable individuals to enter the teaching profession and redesigning university programs to better prepare teachers for the classroom.
- Recognizing, rewarding, and learning from the truly exceptional teachers.
- Improving “quality of teaching” for all teachers with job embedded and targeted professional development.
- Encouraging the most effective teachers to teach in hard to staff schools.
- Keeping the best teachers in the profession over time. The current retention rate in Louisiana is 75% at one year, 50% at three years, and 40% at five years.
- Replacing teachers who are not effective with students.

### Evaluating Effectiveness

Improving teacher effectiveness begins with being able to evaluate it. The New Teacher Project, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap by ensuring that high-need students get outstanding teachers, notes: *“A teacher’s effectiveness – the most important factor for schools in improving student achievement – is not measured, recorded or used to inform decision making in any meaningful way... Excellence goes unrecognized, development is neglected, and poor performance goes unaddressed.”*

School districts often fail to acknowledge or act on differences in teacher performance. In so doing, the

truly exceptional teacher can't be formally identified and schools miss the opportunity to learn from best practices. In a survey in 12 large school districts across the U.S., three of every four teachers went through a formal evaluation process without receiving any specific feedback about how to improve their practice. Less than 1% of teachers in the survey were rated unsatisfactory (the rate also noted in Louisiana schools) – a rate considerably lower than other sectors.

The Gates Foundation launched its Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) initiative several years ago with the goal of improving “the quality of information about teaching effectiveness.” METS is a national best practice research study aimed at providing a new knowledge base for state

and district policymakers and practitioners. This will consist of new teacher effectiveness models and tools that make the cutting edge difference in classroom and student performance. Results of the METS project are expected to be released later this year.

In 2010, the Louisiana Legislature passed Act 54 – a part of Governor Bobby Jindal's school reform agenda. The legislation is designed to ensure Louisiana's parents and citizens that an effective teacher teaches every student and an effective school leader leads every school.

Act 54 focuses on a better process to evaluate the performance of Louisiana's teachers. The legislation requires that teachers and administrative personnel be evaluated annually as opposed to the current three-year evaluation cycle. The law establishes a teacher evaluation process that is half based on student progress during the year and half based on traditional subjective assessment by school leaders. The legislation provides for the development of:

- a better process for identifying and rewarding the most effective teachers;
- targeted job embedded professional development for more teachers; and
- a more objective way to identify ineffective teachers.

## A Model of Success – Louisiana TAP

Louisiana TAP (The System for Teacher and Student Advancement) is a comprehensive teacher quality and school improvement system based on the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's (NIET) proven TAP model. Louisiana TAP is designed to attract, support, develop, and retain great teachers and ultimately improve student achievement.

TAP is based on four elements:

- **Multiple Career Paths** that allow teachers to pursue a variety of career options such as master and mentor teachers in each school.
- **Ongoing Applied Professional Growth** involving increased collaborative time for teachers to share and learn from each other, and to use data to target student instructional needs.

- **Instructionally Focused Accountability** that holds teachers accountable for maintaining high skills standards and for the academic growth of their students.
- **Performance-Based Compensation** that pays teachers according to roles and responsibilities, classroom performance, and student performance.

The TAP system uses a value-added growth calculation to determine the gains of student learning. A value-added gain score of "3" indicates that students grew an expected full year's growth. A score of "4" indicates growth at one standard deviation above an expected full year's growth, and a score of "5" represents growth at two standard deviations above an expected full year's growth. Student growth has been significant in TAP schools.

- For 2007-2008, value-added growth was calculated in thirty-six schools. Twenty-five (25) of the thirty-six schools showed a value-added score of 3 or more, with seventeen of those schools scoring value-added score of 4 or 5.
- For 2008-2009, value-added growth was calculated in thirteen (13) schools. Twelve (12) of the 13 schools received a value-added score of 3 or more. Ten (10) of those schools scored value-added scores of 4 or 5.
- For 2009-2010, value-added growth was calculated in 36 schools, thirty-one (31) or 86% of the thirty-six showed a value-added score of 3 or more. Twenty (20) schools or 56% earned value-added scores of 4 or 5.

During the 2010-2011 school year, there will be 118 schools involved in the Louisiana TAP initiative. Fifty-four schools are TAP schools: twenty-two as Year One TAP schools and thirty-nine as Year Two and Beyond TAP Schools. In addition to the 54 TAP schools, there are 64 Pre-TAP Schools.

## Teacher Quality: Challenges and Key Questions

The focus on the classroom as the basis of meaningful school reform is not a new one. But what Louisiana hasn't done well in the past is recognize and learn from our best teachers and provide targeted professional

development based on individual teacher's strengths and weaknesses. The development of value-added performance assessment for teachers and principals provides a foundation for improving what happens in classrooms across Louisiana.

As Louisiana seeks to improve teacher quality, key questions are:

- How successful will Louisiana be in building district-level support in implementing Act 54 and in embracing other best practice models of evaluating teacher effectiveness?
- Will Louisiana be successful in implementing strategies to attract and retain the best teachers?
- Will Louisiana implement and sustain strategies to improve quality teaching for all teachers through targeted and job embedded professional development?
- Will Louisiana use information from the soon to be released Gates Foundation's "Measures of Effective Teaching" initiative in designing future school improvements efforts?
- Does the quality of the teacher in the classroom matter enough to replace teachers who are not effective with students?