

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
“NCLB Reauthorization:
Strategies for Attracting, Supporting, and Retaining High Quality Educators”
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I would like to thank Chairman Kennedy, Ranking Member Enzi, and the other members of the Committee for inviting me to testify here today. It is a great honor, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to share with you some of our experiences at Thurgood Marshall Elementary School. We are located in the Dallas metropolitan area in Richardson Independent School District.

1. What specific strategies, programs or policies have been effective in addressing the need for qualified educators in your community? What outcomes or progress – with respect to the recruitment and retention of these educators – have been made as a result of these strategies?

THE CHALLENGE

I would like to start by noting that as a high need urban school with very high student mobility rates, we face the challenge of making more than a year’s academic growth with many of our students on a consistent basis. Teachers in our school must be able to make these kinds of academic gains with students to meet our goals as educators, and those articulated by Congress in “No Child Left Behind”. This means our teaching staff must be consistently exemplary, and we must create an environment that encourages them to remain at Thurgood Marshall.

Thurgood Marshall Elementary School has a very high need student population. Our free and reduced lunch percentage is approximately 90%. Of the 540 students we serve, African American students comprise 80% of our student population with Hispanic students comprising 19% of the population. The school is located in an area that is surrounded by apartment complexes. One would naturally surmise that the children from those neighboring apartment buildings would make up my student population. Quite the contrary is true! The boundary lines have been configured so as to allow a minimal number of the Thurgood Marshall students from nearby apartment buildings to attend. Most of our students come from apartments that are located on the opposite side of a very busy freeway; thus these students ride buses to the school. As a result, many of our students and parents are not able to attend after school extra curricular activities or receive additional assistance because they lack transportation. Teachers who would provide additional aid to children before and/or after school are unable to do so because students are not available.

Moreover, many of our students come from one parent homes, and an extraordinary number of those parents are very young single mothers. These families tend to have very limited income, which results in frustrated young mothers who are sometimes abusive to their children as they strive to cope with their own personal struggles. Teachers encountered a great number of young mothers who were not capable of appropriately conferencing with teachers regarding their children's academic and/or disciplinary issues, etc. Frequently, they resorted to the use of intimidating behaviors, which included shouting, cursing, and threatening. Most of the teachers were quite intimidated, and chose to avoid calling parents rather than confronting such challenges.

Many of our students have fathers who are either imprisoned, or simply uninvolved in the lives of their children. Also, families most often consist of children whose siblings have different fathers. As a result, the students struggle with some emotional issues that often interfere with their ability to totally focus on learning. Due to their circumstances at home, they tend to be quite transient. Our mobility rate for 2005-06 was approximately 124%, which is quite frustrating to teachers because they find themselves making progress, only to lose students with whom they have worked so diligently. Not only that, but some of our students leave, stay away two months or more, and then return. Teachers then have to practically start all over again with those students.

Our first year of operation was very much that type of environment, and after Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana, we received an influx of those evacuees because the spacious new school could more readily accommodate them. At one point, our student population was 10% Katrina/Rita evacuees. Those students' arrival to Thurgood Marshall Elementary greatly augmented our challenges and presented us with some emotionally disturbed children who had been trapped in a dome for days, after having faced the very traumatic ordeal that would naturally evolve from such an experience. In addition to continually working with an already existing high need population, the teachers then had to adjust their instruction to tailor fit the needs of students who had even bigger learning gaps to close. (Accountability differs greatly from the state to state.)

Not only did the evacuees arrive in need of some intensive instructional adjustments, they also came with these issues:

1. Children who had been diagnosed as AD-HD, MR, etc. had lost their medication during the violence of the storm.
2. Parents often could not give us information that would aid in appropriate placement of their students, and some of those students had been receiving special services.
3. We had no way of getting students' records, medical records, immunization history, etc.
4. Students were exceedingly more volatile and exhibited a greater need for social reform.
5. Thurgood Marshall's currently enrolled students and the evacuees had to learn how to coexist, and they sometimes "missed the mark" on that one.
6. Such sudden changes greatly impacted the teachers and their existing learning environment.

7. Teachers suddenly had to cope with these issues until the district could procure the funding that would allow for more personnel to aid in instructing these students to get these students closer to their grade level performance.
8. To keep things even more interesting, another hurricane – Rita – hit Louisiana and Southeast Texas to add a few more students and challenges to our numbers.
9. The evacuees were in the habit of returning intermittently to Louisiana and coming back to Thurgood Marshall, which increased both our mobility rate and teachers' challenges.

The above challenges were added to (a) opening a new school that was implementing a new program – the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), (b) striving to build morale and interpersonal employee relationships with a group of teachers who were unknown to each other, (c) striving to build employee and student relationships in a new school where students knew none of the adults and few of their peers, (d) striving to instill trust (administrator – employee; teacher – teacher; student – student; and adult – student) in such a new environment, and (e) acclimating so many novice employees to the particular policies, curriculum, methodology, etc.

We faced all of these challenges continually, and the first semester was filled with very long days as we put in hours of work to plan, collaborate, and continue the pattern of preparing for every next day of learning. These days came after very long hours summer days filled with interviewing and screening applicants, receiving shipments to fill an empty school that was to open soon, working out logistics and details regarding first day enrollment, how to receive and dismiss students (of whom approximately one-third ride the bus), fire drill/evacuation/disaster drill guidelines, and a myriad of other tasks. The interviews themselves were long and draining because we had to present the Teacher Advancement Program in addition to screening/attaining the necessary information to make an informed decision. Although it was a very good problem to have, the Teacher Advancement Program inevitably led to more questions, discussion, and interest; thus, the interviews grew even longer! We persevered because we know, and research has confirmed, that teacher quality and effective instruction is what can ultimately lead to student achievement gains.

THE TEACHER ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM

The key for us is recruitment, retention, and development of effective teachers. We must have a system in place to help teachers to become outstanding, and our teachers are looking for that support. The professional support system provided by TAP, as I have alluded, was one of the key elements in my ability to attract teachers to Thurgood Marshall when it opened as a new school.

In a high need school there is a tremendous need to implement a support structure that enables teachers to continually improve the effectiveness of their instruction if students are going to continue improving academically. TAP had achieved this success with similar students in other high need schools. Research showed us that 64% of TAP schools with 30% or more of students receiving free or reduced price lunch, and 54% of these

high need schools increase their percent of students at proficient or above from 2003-2004 to 2004-2005. This evidence is why we chose to implement TAP.

The method for achieving these results is an intensive focus on increasing teacher quality through a comprehensive program that includes 1) school based professional development led by Master and Mentor teachers, 3) career opportunities for teachers to take on additional roles and responsibilities with additional pay, 3) a fair, rigorous, and objective evaluation system for teachers and principals, and 4) performance based pay incentives. Thurgood Marshall began implementing TAP in the fall of 2005. I have included a summary of our program below.

TAP at Thurgood Marshall

- 1. Building the Capacity of Teachers and Principals Through Professional Development** that is directly aligned to content standards and elements of effective instruction takes place during the regular school day, so educators can constantly improve the quality of their instruction and increase their students' academic achievement. This allows teachers to learn new instructional strategies and have greater opportunity to collaborate, both of which will lead them to become more effective teachers.
- 2. Additional Roles and Responsibilities** allow teachers to progress from a Career, Mentor and Master teacher—depending upon their interests, abilities and accomplishments. This allows good teachers to advance without having to leave the classroom and provides the expert staff to deliver intensive, school-based professional development that supports more rigorous coursework and Texas standards.
- 3. A Fair, Rigorous and Objective Evaluation Process** for evaluating teachers and principals. Teachers are held accountable for meeting standards that are based on effective instruction, as well as for the academic growth of their students, and principals are evaluated based on student achievement growth as well as other leadership factors. Evaluations are conducted multiple times each year by trained and certified evaluators (administrators, Master and Mentor teachers) using clearly defined rubrics which reduces the possibility of bias or favoritism.
- 4. Performance-based Compensation Based on Student Achievement Gains and Classroom Evaluations of Teachers Throughout the Year.** Student achievement is measured using “value added” measures of student learning gains from year to year. Performance pay is based on TX standards and TX assessment – both valid and reliable measures of student achievement that are used to calculate progress under NCLB.

THE RESULTS

Outcomes that have been achieved:

The TAP allowed us to attract such qualified teachers that students progressed very quickly. The support that these qualified teachers received from the TAP Master Teachers, coupled with their existing proficient skills, benefited students greatly. With all staff members unified across the building to teach the TAP Cluster strategies, the team of educators was able to close students' learning gaps at an extraordinary rate. Therefore,

students at the school continually demonstrated progress on teacher made assessments, Master Teachers' post testing instruments, campus and district benchmarks, and the state's high stakes standardized tests.

Student Achievement Results with TAP in the First Year

During its first year of existence, Thurgood Marshall met AYP and received Recognized status from the state of Texas for our student achievement scores. Thurgood Marshall's Texas Growth Index (TGI) score was 18%. The average TGI values for comparison groups of similar schools are rank ordered. Thurgood received Gold Performance Acknowledgement because we fell within the first Quartile of the comparison group (meaning our students did better than 75% of similar schools in producing student achievement gains). Thurgood Marshall also had a school-wide value added gain in 2005-2006 its first year of existence of a 5 – showing the school met more than a year's worth of growth.*

By fostering a culture of continuous professional growth and reflection, creating multiple career paths for teachers, and rewarding effective teaching and student achievement, TAP has been instrumental in building a professional learning community at Thurgood Marshall where teachers feel both supported and challenged to refine and deepen their craft. The introduction of weekly TAP cluster groups along with bi-monthly interim assessments has ensured continuous monitoring of student progress and given faculty the data and skills to tailor instruction to areas of academic need.

It is the Richardson Independent School District's custom to administer benchmarks intermittently throughout the school year. Last year we noticed tremendous gains much earlier in the year than students at my former school had achieved. Students' learning gaps were closing at an astounding rate! At some grade levels, the newly opened school was quite competitive with other schools across the district that did not have the same challenges that our school faced. For example, our fourth grade students of 2005-06 had a higher rate of students passing the Math Benchmark than some schools whose demographics were totally different than ours. Not only was I thrilled, but the RISD central office personnel were also impressed. Teachers noted that their students were progressing quite rapidly in the classroom, and Master teachers noticed their progress as they modeled/taught in the classrooms. The ultimate results came when we received students' scores from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, our high stakes test. The results are the following:

* In evaluating TAP teachers and similarly TAP schools, SAS EVAAS calculates the effect of each teacher on student progress as assessed by the difference between the growth scores of the teacher's students and the average growth scores of the control group, which defines a year's growth. We then place each teacher (TAP and control) in one of five categories.

Teachers in categories "1" and "2" produced less than an average year's growth with their students, and teachers in categories "3", "4", and "5" produced a year's growth or more with their students.

2006 School Accountability Rating: **Recognized***

Gold Performance Acknowledgments:

Commended on Mathematics

Comparable Improvement: Reading/ELA & Mathematics

READING – 82% of students passed

MATHEMATICS – 78% of students passed

WRITING – 99% of students passed

SCIENCE – 71% of students passed

SDAA II (State Developed Alternative Assessment – for student who don't take TAKS) – 97% of students passed

Not only are overall passing rates commendable, but since implementing TAP, Thurgood Marshall has made significant progress with groups that are most in need. The percentage of At-Risk students who passed the TAKS increased 25% on writing (75% to 100%) and 10% in math (from 60% to 70%). Similar increases were seen among those categorized as economically disadvantaged (14% writing and 9% in math).

NATIONAL TAP RESULTS

At the national level, TAP schools that have been implementing the program for a number of years demonstrated student achievement results. A report released recently by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, the non-profit organization that developed and oversees TAP, concluded that teachers and schools participating in the program produce higher student achievement growth than their control counterparts. Comparisons also show TAP's meaningful results in terms of adequate yearly progress (AYP), and its support among teachers as an effective professional development program. The full report can be found at www.talentedteachers.org.

The report shows that TAP teachers demonstrate higher achievement growth than control schools. In every TAP state, TAP teachers outperformed similar non-TAP teachers in producing an average year's growth or more in their students' achievement.

* ** STATE OF TEXAS RATINGS:

To be rated as "Exemplary", a school must have 90% of its students passing.

In 2005-06, at least 70% of students had to pass for a school to have a "Recognized" rating; this year (06-07) it is raised to a 75% passing rate.

Academically Acceptable = 60% passing Reading, Writing, and Social Studies; 45% passing Mathematics; 40% passing Science

Low Performing = 35% passing

In addition, More TAP schools outperformed similar non-TAP schools in producing an average year's growth or more in both reading and math achievement.

RECRUITING

I have seen several changes in the recruiting effort. Applicants become very interested in working at Thurgood Marshall Elementary when they hear about the amount of support they will get from the TAP Master and Mentor teachers. My team and I have conducted interviews where we observed the applicant's countenance immediately change when we started to discuss that there would be weekly staff development trainings in TAP Cluster Meetings to teach them strategies to use in the classroom. As we explained that these would be research based strategies that have been proven effective, the applicant usually became even more inquisitive and excited. This was true with both highly experienced teachers as well as those with little or no experience.

All except one (out of approximately 80 applicants) expressed a desire to attend those kinds of meetings if it would mean that a Master Teacher would follow up with modeling in their classroom, team teaching with them, and/or coming in to their rooms to observe them teach the strategy. The applicant we lost to disinterest expressed her need to have her classroom time alone with her students without the presence of guests. All others are very enthusiastic even about the follow up coaching that Master Teachers provide after observing TAP Career Teachers teaching the TAP strategy.

The Teacher Advancement Program was instrumental in my ability to recruit eight teachers from my former school, three from schools within the district, and thirty-three teachers from other locations.

REDUCING TEACHER TURNOVER

One of the most costly challenges facing schools is high teacher turnover. Nationally, more than 50% of new teachers leave before they have been teaching five years. In the Dallas area, we have an even higher teacher and principal turnover rate in our high need schools. This makes it very challenging to provide continuity for students of poverty – who need stability in the teaching force to achieve.

After recruiting very interested, qualified teachers, we were able to retain many of them. Some found, however, that they were not capable of effectively (a) interacting with the students' apathetic and frequently volatile parents, (b) coping with the issues that arise when working with a very transient population of children, (c) interacting with children who had serious problems associated with hygiene, (d) interacting with students who lacked appropriate social skills, and (e) giving the necessary tireless efforts everyday that are essential when closing academic learning gaps of low socio-economic students.

Of the teachers who left, two of them moved to another TAP school in the district (promotions); a TAP Master Teacher moved back to teaching and remained in the district, and five of them sought work with a different student population. Of that five,

one of them transferred within the district because she was dissatisfied with the students' inability to manage their own discipline. Additionally, seven teachers moved to other positions within our school. It is also worth noting that two teachers chose to stay home with their expected babies, one Master Teacher relocated when her husband had to transfer, one left to work in her husband's church, one left because her daughter was seriously ill, and yet another teacher relocated to get married. Since only two teachers were non-renewed due to their ineffective classroom teaching practices, I maintain that implementation of the Teacher Advancement Program allowed for us to attract a majority of qualified teachers to our opening school and to build our faculties' skills over the course of the year. It is extremely rare to hire such a large number of qualified teachers when there is a need to staff a building for its first year of operation.

COLLEGIALITY AND PERFORMANCE PAY

As a building principal, I have made so many ineffectual attempts to build collegiality, all of which have failed until TAP. No matter how many games we played prior to a large staff development faculty meeting, and no matter how many ice breakers I tried throughout the year, teachers continued to return to their own special groups when the meetings ended. Through its weekly cluster group meetings, TAP provides a way for grade level teachers to come together with Master and Mentor teachers, support teachers such as librarians, and educators who teach Special Education courses or Special Areas teachers. They establish positive relationships as they work together toward a common goal: student achievement! This is evident when, for example, a P. E. teacher talks with a second grade teacher about using a TAP "Cluster Group" strategy that focuses on word meaning when teaching students how to dribble a basketball.

For the first time in my seven years as an administrator, I had the joy of learning that a large group of my teachers were going to Las Vegas together to enjoy their spring break. The most surprising part of that news was that the teachers were a mixed group of both primary and intermediate teachers, and usually that twain never meets.

While teachers last year rarely mentioned the TAP payout for performance, they were very excited when they received their bonus pay in the fall of 2006. The district's TAP Director and central office personnel held a special ceremony to celebrate those teachers who received the bonus checks, and the teachers seemed to really appreciate the honor. It was their time to be recognized for their diligence, and they enjoyed the time of celebration. For several weeks, I heard talk of how the money would be spent, and it ranged from weddings to vacations! After that time, it was back to work, and oddly enough, I hear hardly anything at all about the payout bonus. There is, by far, more discussion about students' needs, how to meet them, specific TAP Cluster Group strategies, and ultimate student achievement.

FUNDING TAP

The Teacher Advancement Program at Thurgood Marshall is funded in the following ways:

- Title V (NCLB) – grant for innovative programs
- Title I (NCLB) – a state grant
- Priority Funds – local tax dollars
- Title II (NCLB) – a state grant for teacher quality and recruitment

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Here’s a quote from a community person who serves on our Local School Council, “I am so very impressed with what I see going on in this school. The hard work of the teachers is incredible! It is amazing to watch these teachers working with the students.”

This is a quote from a parent, “I really hate living in this area, but the school is so good that I don’t want to leave it. You all have helped my children so much, and they love it.”

2. What strategies do you believe are most effective in terms of providing professional development and support to educators in high need schools? Is professional development being targeted to educators to respond to their needs and, if so, on what criteria or data was the targeting based?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Weekly cluster meetings provide the primary vehicle through which professional development is implemented within a TAP school. Clusters are weekly job-embedded meetings attended by a group of teachers with similar students and are led by a master or mentor teacher that is part of the school faculty. This is an important element of TAP clusters in that they are led by a teacher with personal knowledge and understanding of the needs of the students and teachers at the school as opposed to an outside trainer who does not have this personal knowledge.

During these weekly professional development meetings, a master or mentor teacher models effective implementation of a strategy targeted at an identified student need represented by the cluster members’ students. Throughout a cluster cycle, teachers continually analyze and utilize student work as they develop the strategies learned for their specific students and content area. Everything in the Cluster Group is driven by student work and student needs. This includes needs identified through standardized tests as well as through benchmark assessments and informal assessments by teachers, and through analysis of individual student work.

When we opened Thurgood Marshall Elementary in the fall of 2005, we had to pre-test all of our students because they came from so many different areas of the city, cities, and even states. Some are from Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Mississippi. We used our data to

not only drive our decision making concerning school goals and cluster goals, but to also drive instruction. This continues to allow teachers to learn new instructional strategies and have greater opportunity to collaborate, both of which will lead them to become more effective teachers.

When the evacuees arrived, we had to pre-test them as well to determine where they were academically so that we could better tailor small group instruction to fit their needs. Then we had to screen applicants and hire additional part time employees to pull students out of the regular classrooms and provide that instruction.

TAP does not adhere to the traditional mode of professional development of teachers. Traditionally, teachers attend professional development sessions throughout the course of the school year. They attend, sit, listen, and get a ton of new ideas and materials to use in their classrooms. Unfortunately, they are often either fearful to try it or overwhelmed by it all because they have no idea of how to implement into their lesson design/planning. Thus, they usually end up placing all the new materials on a bookshelf or in some cabinet, and they push all the innovative ideas to the back of their minds. The result is too often that teachers learn about some effective classroom practices, but nobody ever utilizes any of them. The tragic result: classroom practices do not change.

The TAP, on the other hand, introduces the critical attributes of research-based, proven effective classroom strategies, the master teacher models the teaching of the strategies (even creating a simulated classroom setting where the teachers who are learning the strategy become the students), and then the master teacher follows up by either modeling the strategy again in the actual classroom setting or team teaching with the career teacher. This method of training removes the guesswork for the teacher and supports the teacher throughout the entire process. Finally, there is opportunity for post-conferencing and coaching to further address any needs or concerns. The ultimate result to the TAP model: effective classroom practices that yield student success!

EVALUATIONS

Another important input to professional development is provided through TAP's comprehensive system for evaluating teachers and rewarding them for how well they teach their students. Every teacher in our school is evaluated at least four times each year by trained and certified evaluators who are the master teachers, mentor teachers, and the administrators. Evaluations are based on research-based standards in four areas: planning instruction, learning environment, responsibilities, and implementing instruction. Teachers are given this detailed rubric and are well prepared for their evaluation. In addition, pre and post conferences are held with each teacher to design strategies for growth, and coaching is provided throughout the year.

CAREER OPPORTUNITY

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 they move up the ranks, their qualifications, roles, and responsibilities increase – and so does their compensation. This allows good teachers to advance without having to leave the classroom.

Master and mentor teachers must have expert curricular knowledge, outstanding instructional skills, and the ability to work effectively with other adults. They take on additional responsibility and authority, and are required to have a longer work year. Master teacher stipends are approximately \$8,000, and Mentor teacher stipends are approximately \$4,000.

In order to provide quality, school-based, job-embedded professional development, there must be a qualified team of individuals to provide this training. TAP allows for instructional leadership within a school to be shared among members of the TAP Leadership Team (Principal, Assistant Principal, and Master and Mentor Teachers) in a participatory leadership model. I believe there is a positive relationship between employees' motivation and their ability to advance within their career. The consensus in this research is that employees who have opportunities for career advancement are motivated to improve the quality of their work. In my experience, TAP's combination of fiscal and work opportunity incentives creates a total package that appeals to teachers.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the Teacher Advancement Program is an effective model for these reasons:

- It offers support to career teachers, especially to those teachers who are new to the educational arena. Since universities often provide knowledge, more so than effective classroom practices, graduates in the teaching field are frequently unequipped to provide educational opportunities that allow *all* children to grow.
- TAP develops good teachers into outstanding teachers and retains them in the field of education. It attracts those teachers who come with a good knowledge base, some skills, and hones those skills. Since teaching is such a vital profession that pays so little, TAP augments teachers' salaries.
- TAP builds collegiality within a school's learning environment.
- TAP effectively trains teachers while offering them the necessary support to ensure successful careers.
- TAP supports teachers in delivering a more rigorous curriculum.
- And, most important, TAP offers the low socio-economic student an opportunity to learn that might otherwise have been forfeited.

Successful teachers automatically produce successful students. Successful students ensure a brighter future for America. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about our work at Thurgood Marshall.