



# Effective Technical Assistance Principles

Lessons from Three Performance Pay Programs

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Jessica L. Lewis and Matthew G. Springer December 2009



Center for American Progress



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# Introduction and summary

Pay for performance in education is based on the premise that monetary incentives will provide schools with tools to recruit and retain highly effective teachers and help educators focus on the pedagogical and organizational changes required to improve student learning. Pay-for-performance programs may reward individual teachers, groups of teachers, or schools on the basis of any number of factors, including student test scores, classroom observations, teacher portfolios, or working in hard-to-staff schools or subject areas.

Recent investment in domestic teacher pay-for-performance programs has been substantial. Many public school districts, and even entire states such as Florida, Minnesota, and Texas, are exploring performance pay as a means to improve administrator and teacher productivity and recruit more qualified teachers. Interest in such programs in the United States is growing, as is the number of programs under development and being implemented.

However, mounting public interest in teacher compensation reform does not necessarily equate with universal support. While proponents now transcend political boundaries, a sturdy and influential base of individuals and organizations is still fundamentally opposed to modifying the single salary schedule for numerous reasons—for example, they believe that performance pay would deteriorate the collaborative culture of teaching or that it is simply not possible to find a fair and objective means to evaluate educators' contribution to student achievement.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, avenues for more performance pay initiatives are blooming in the current political climate. Federal funding initiatives alone, such as the Teacher Incentive Fund and Race to the Top, offer millions in dollars to schools for the development of alternative educator compensation systems.<sup>2</sup> As of 2009, for example, TIF has allocated over \$200 million to a handful of districts and states for the design and implementation of performance pay programs. As pay-for-performance programs gain popularity in education, it is important that those implementing them not only buy into the policy but also gain the knowledge, skills, and capacity to implement them successfully.

More than a handful of previous programs have floundered due to poor planning and design, insufficient training, and erratic funding. Technical assistance, which involves training in areas that aid schools or districts in program design and implementation, can play a vital role in tackling these issues, especially if the assistance deals not only with necessary

topics for quality programs—such as helping a school determine fair and quality measures of educator performance, developing data systems, and calculating bonus awards—but also integrates tactics to ensure that lessons learned from training are sustained over time and embedded in the organization’s culture and systems. Moreover, these tactics ensure that key lessons for quality program operation are not only understood by school practitioners at the time of delivery, but persist throughout the duration of program implementation.

This paper focuses on technical assistance provided to school systems interested in performance pay and how such assistance can facilitate a higher quality of program design and implementation. The paper begins by first reviewing the current pay-for-performance landscape and the role of technical assistance in the midst of the current wave of compensation reform. It then examines the technical assistance associated with three prominent performance pay programs—the national Teacher Advancement Program, or TAP, and two state-funded programs, Minnesota’s Quality Compensation Plan, or Q Comp, and the District Awards for Teacher Excellence, or D.A.T.E. program in Texas—before closing with a set of key recommendations for future practice.

More specifically, the report addresses the following three questions:

- What is the current state of performance pay policy and what is known about the potential promises and pitfalls of such programs?
- What is the nature of technical assistance programs that are associated with several prominent performance pay programs?
- What are key principles for successful technical assistance initiatives that sustain quality design and implementation of performance pay programs over time?

After interviewing officials and reviewing documents associated with each of the three performance pay program’s technical assistance initiatives, the paper identifies several notable features that are largely shared by the technical assistance providers associated with TAP, Q Comp, and D.A.T.E. programs.

**What is the substantive focus of technical assistance?** Technical assistance providers do not limit training to current program participants but also reach out to prospective performance pay program participants. In doing so they address issues such as securing funds—grants, for example—to participate in performance pay initiatives, understanding the nuts and bolts for implementing specific program guidelines, and raising overall awareness about performance pay reform. In many cases, performance pay is just one of several topics addressed, as technical assistance providers guide participants through a more holistic approach to teacher quality reform.

**At what points in time is technical assistance often provided?** In all cases, technical assistance providers work with schools and districts throughout the life of their program participation. However, there is a general sense among technical assistance providers that technical assistance is—and should be—front loaded in the early stages of program implementation.



**What are common strategies for delivering technical assistance?** Technical assistance providers generally use a mixed-methods approach. Many use a combination of pre-scribed and customized training, some required and some nonmandatory. They value face-to-face, onsite technical assistance offerings but make use of real-time, readily accessible electronic resources, such as the Internet, as well.

**How is technical assistance evolving and why?** First and foremost, technical assistance providers are certainly evolving their practices over time. They are primarily pushing to increase practitioner-to-practitioner sharing, advancing online learning opportunities, and targeting classroom teachers more directly, rather than relying so heavily on a train-the-trainer model.

The paper concludes with four principles that should be used by technical assistance providers. These are principles to facilitate a higher quality of design, implementation, and sustainability of performance pay programs over time. Specifically, current and future providers need to:

- Systematically align the goals of performance pay programs with those of the particular education system.
- Address workplace barriers early on that might interfere with sustained application of training.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to know and predict program participants' needs.
- Provide meaningful training through opportunities to apply learning.

These principles have broad application, but they are highly relevant to educator compensation reform and can facilitate long-lasting and ever-improving practice for performance pay programs.

# Current performance pay policy landscape and its origins

Teacher pay-for-performance programs date back to Great Britain in the early 1700s, with analogous ideas forming intermittently during the historical development of the U.S. K-12 public education system. Efforts to institute teacher performance pay policies have emerged in virtually every decade since Denver and Des Moines adopted the single salary schedule in the early 20th century, which was seen as a way to level the playing field by remunerating teachers on the same scale regardless of race, gender, or grade level taught. Teacher pay under the single salary schedule was determined according to two criteria thought to be the most important to teacher productivity: years of education and years of experience.

Within two years of initial implementation of the single salary schedule, merit pay compensation began to wane. A 1923 National Education Association survey revealed 33 percent of sampled districts used merit pay, a figure that decreased to 18 percent in a subsequent 1928 survey. Not without note, in the 1940s, Thurgood Marshall—then with the NAACP—filed several lawsuits challenging unequal pay between white and black teachers. Wishing to avoid similar lawsuits, some states preemptively adopted the single salary schedule and moved away from merit-based compensation.<sup>3</sup> Officially endorsed by the NEA in 1944, the single salary schedule was adopted by 97 percent of all schools by 1950.<sup>4</sup>

The initial appeal of the single salary schedule was tremendous. It was lauded for creating pay equity, professionalism, and employee satisfaction across grade levels, districts, and disciplines.<sup>5</sup> Highly predictable, it also made it easier for a school to forecast their operating budgets, while annual salary negotiations between school boards and teachers unions were more transparent.

Despite its advantages, the single salary schedule is not without potential drawbacks. Opponents have argued treating teachers as equals and not accounting for differences in output or performance among teachers “offers a premium to mediocrity, if not to positive ignorance and incompetency.”<sup>6</sup>

Arthur Moehlman, a leading school finance scholar in the 1960s and 1970s, advocated for a teacher pay system that provided “as scientifically as possible for the best returns to society for the increasing public investment” by approaching salaries from “its economic and social aspects and not in terms of sentimentality.” However, Moehlman eventually abandoned his appeal for several reasons: the absence of an objective and standardized system

for evaluating teacher performance; a deficiency in the technical capacity to design and implement a merit pay system; and the lack of empirical evidence supporting suspected inefficiencies that arise from the rigidities of the single salary schedule.

Decades later, research on U.S. performance pay programs has tended to focus on short-run motivational effects and be highly diverse in terms of methodology, target populations, and evaluated programs.<sup>7</sup> A number of experiments and quasi-experimental evaluations paint a mixed picture of such programs' impacts, particularly in regard to student achievement. And in several instances researchers' ability to use the most rigorous of research designs has been limited by the ways performance pay programs are designed and implemented in practice. Therefore, making definitive claims about the outcomes of such programs remains a challenging task.

A number of ongoing randomized field trials in the United States are examining performance pay's effect on student achievement. They include a study of pay for performance in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee, Round Rock Independent School District in Texas, New York City public schools in New York, and Chicago Public Schools in Illinois. Other nonrandomized evaluations, but of notable scale, include an examination of state-funded performance pay programs in Texas and ProComp in Denver. Other studies are evaluating programs such as Q Comp in Minnesota, Austin Independent School District's REACH in Texas, and Guilford County's Mission Possible in North Carolina.

The most rigorous evidence to date comes from abroad. Specifically, Indian and Israeli experiments found that teacher incentive programs improved student outcomes and promoted positive changes in teacher behavior and/or classroom pedagogy.<sup>8</sup> Other research similarly reported that students instructed by teachers who were eligible to receive a bonus award in Kenya demonstrated better scores on high-stakes achievement tests, the results of which determined teachers' bonus award eligibility. However, no discernible impact was found on other assessments of student achievement; that is, those for which results did not affect a teachers' ability to earn a bonus award, nor was there a notable impact on the scores of the same students when they took high-stakes tests in the year after the performance pay program ended.<sup>9</sup>

Another research community objective has been to identify how the design and implementation of performance pay plans influence program outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Most performance pay initiatives can be classified into a handful of categories, including knowledge- and skill-based pay, variable compensation plans such as performance pay and merit pay, enhanced career options or career ladders, market-based pay in hard-to-staff fields or schools, enhanced professional responsibilities, nonmonetary recognition, and improved working conditions. Table 1 below delineates the most typical types of compensation reforms proposed in the education sector, though it does not fully capture all types of programs.<sup>11</sup>

**TABLE 1**  
**Types of teacher compensation reform**

Kinds of programs and definitions and activities

Type of program	Definition and activities
Pay-for-performance	Rewards based on predetermined tasks or outcomes, or both, related to teacher and student behaviors. <i>Input examples:</i> Teacher collaboration, professional development, and lesson preparation. <i>Output examples:</i> Student test scores, graduation rates, dropout rates, student and teacher attendance.
Knowledge- and skills-based pay	Rewards based on completion of teacher activities that are related to the development of knowledge and skills linked to improved student outcomes, as well as demonstration of classroom mastery. <i>Input examples:</i> Portfolio completion, dual certification, graduate degree in subject taught, standards-based teacher evaluation, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification.
Career ladders	Provides new roles for teachers with additional pay and responsibilities as they increase their knowledge and skills. Plans typically involve vertical steps with multiple objectives within each step. <i>Input examples:</i> Additional training and professional development, earning advanced degrees, assuming higher levels of instructional responsibility, and mentoring new teachers.
Hard-to-staff subjects	Incentives are targeted to teachers in subject areas where there are shortages, which are based on need at the school, district, or state level. Math, science, and special education are common examples. <i>Input examples:</i> Teachers trained in a high-need subject area teach in a school experiencing that shortage; teachers are compensated for pursuing subject area endorsements in high-needs areas.
Hard-to-staff schools	Incentives are offered for teaching in high-needs schools or districts, typically either high-poverty, low-performing, or geographically remote schools. Like hard-to-staff subject incentives, these incentives are designed specifically to address market factor influences. <i>Input examples:</i> Teachers are awarded bonuses for working in high-needs, hard-to-staff schools.
Recruitment and retention awards	Rewards are offered to attract educators to a school and to encourage continued years of service. <i>Input examples:</i> Awards are offered for signing a contract to work in a specific school or district. Annual bonuses are offered for each year of continued service in the school or district.

An evaluation of state-funded performance pay in Texas looked at the influence that program design features had on the experiences of educators participating in the state’s performance pay system. Researchers found, for example, that educators experiencing consecutive years of program participation had more favorable attitudes toward performance pay—both generally and about the program specifically—than their counterparts in schools participating on a less consistent basis.<sup>12</sup> And the receipt and amount of bonus awarded to teachers has consistently had a strong influence on teacher turnover decisions.<sup>13</sup>

How school systems integrate these performance pay programs into their existing operations can also influence the program’s outcomes. Recent research indicates several key lessons, for example, that implementation will be much more viable if it is aligned with other school system goals, crafted with and not exclusively for teachers, not punitive in nature, and accompanied with capacity-building initiatives.<sup>14</sup> And as alluded to earlier and reiterated in several reports, inconsistent and unpredictable program participation by schools—both in terms of financial commitments and eligibility criteria—does not bode well for program success.<sup>15</sup>

While a body of growing research and mounting experiences in performance pay implementation provide insight about the importance of program design and its consequences for program success, translating these lessons into practice remains a challenging task. For example, some design choices are simply less politically popular or practically feasible. Awards based on individual performance alone tend to be a harder sell than the use of group-based awards. While many view performance pay plans inclusive of all teaching personnel as more equitable, localities still struggle with identifying objective measures of teacher performance outcomes in nontested subject areas and grades. And securing long-term financial resources—especially in today’s economic climate—is no guarantee.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, our review of the current landscape and its origins shows that performance pay programs do show promise, or at least enough mixed evidence to counter opponents’ assertions of definite negative outcomes. And a growing knowledge base shines light on common pitfalls to be avoided. These lessons are evermore important to heed as performance pay is currently becoming a highly popular idea in the current U.S. public education system.

With this in mind, we now turn to how performance pay implementation can be made more effective through systematic and informed technical assistance. In doing so, we first review current practices used by technical assistance providers for three prominent performance pay programs.

Translating lessons  
into practice remains  
a challenging task.

# Strategy for reviewing technical assistance initiatives

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## The initiatives

The national Teacher Advancement Program, or TAP model, and two state-funded programs, Minnesota’s Quality Compensation Plan, or Q Comp, and the District Awards for Teacher Excellence, or D.A.T.E. program in Texas, are three current initiatives in performance pay reform accompanied by notable technical assistance provisions. Some are more developed than others.

These programs—and their technical assistance initiatives, specifically—are described in this section of the paper in order to identify key features of current practice in the area of performance pay reform.

We recognize that these three programs are certainly not all encompassing of the performance pay landscape and do not capture more locally operated performance pay initiatives cropping up across the country. However, they do provide information-rich sites from which to identify current technical assistance practices. These three programs were chosen because of their scope—both monetarily and in number of participants—and their prominence in performance pay discussions. TAP represents a nationwide initiative, while Q Comp and D.A.T.E. are local efforts guided more generally by state guidelines. They have been operating for varying lengths of time, which also offers unique perspectives of how technical assistance initiatives may evolve during the life of a program. Figure 1 provides an overview of each of these programs.<sup>17</sup>

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## The methodology

We first examine the nature of each program’s technical assistance, looking at the type of provider(s), who participates, topics addressed, means for and timing of delivery, and adaptations over time. We gathered this information using multiple sources of information. We conducted interviews with program coordinators overseeing technical assistance for each of the three programs highlighted in the paper.<sup>18</sup> These interviews were supplemented by our review of online resources pertaining to each program’s technical assistance offerings. In fact, each program has a prominent online presence, giving us ready access to the types of materials available to program participants or prospective participants. Finally, we drew relevant information from a number of evaluations conducted of these programs to date.<sup>19</sup>

FIGURE 1

## Overview of performance pay programs

Summaries of the Teacher Advancement Program, Minnesota's Quality Compensation Plan, and the District Awards for Teacher Excellence program

### TAP™: The System for Teacher and Student Achievement

The Teacher Advancement Program is now part of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, or NIET. NIET is an organization committed to establishing a high-quality, competitively compensated, and equitably distributed workforce of teachers throughout the nation's K-12 education system. Their primary work is ensuring the effective and sustainable implementation of the TAP system. The TAP system has been in operation since 1999 when it was launched by the Milken Family Foundation. TAP provides a model for systemic teacher quality reform and is organized around four components: multiple career paths, ongoing applied professional growth, instructionally focused accountability, and performance-based compensation. TAP provides opportunities for extra pay based on teachers' performance, their knowledge and skills, and for assuming additional roles and responsibilities. The model recommends that performance-based pay be weighted as follows: 50 percent on teacher evaluations, 30 percent on individual classroom achievement growth, and 20 percent on school-wide achievement growth. Additionally, mentor teachers can earn up to \$7,000 annually in extra pay, while master teachers can earn up to \$15,000 annually. The TAP model is used nationally and operates in roughly 220 schools involving approximately 85,000 students and over 7,500 teachers.

To learn more about TAP, visit their [website](#).

### Minnesota's Quality Compensation Plan Program

Minnesota's Quality Compensation Program was enacted in 2005 by the state legislature and was largely inspired by the TAP model. The governor approved an initial \$86 million in state funds for the voluntary program, which is administered by the Minnesota Department of Education. It

provides roughly \$260 per student to districts that elect to participate. Districts' plans must include five key components: a career ladder, job-embedded professional development, standards-based evaluation system for teachers, an alternative salary schedule, and performance-based pay. The last component requires participating districts to use student achievement on standardized tests to determine at least 60 percent of performance pay for teachers. In fiscal year 2009, the state will allocate \$49 million to Q Comp. Currently, 44 districts and 32 charter schools—out of nearly 500 statewide—have participated or been approved to participate in the program during the 2009-10 school year.

To learn more about Q Comp, visit the program's [website](#).

### Texas' District Awards for Teacher Excellence Program

The 79th Texas Legislature passed D.A.T.E. in May 2006 with \$147.5 million in state funds to provide grants for districts to create or continue a system for rewarding educators for their contribution to student achievement. It is a voluntary program and participating districts can use funds to implement locally designed performance pay plans or to implement the TAP model. At least 60 percent of grant funds must be used for performance-based bonuses to teachers and principals, with remaining funds used for purposes such as professional development, stipends for school personnel, or enhancing local data capabilities. During the first cycle of D.A.T.E. (2008-09 school year), 203 districts participated. The program continues with nearly \$198 million in state funds for each of the 2010 and 2011 fiscal years

To learn more about D.A.T.E., visit the program's [website](#).

After discussing each program's technical assistance provisions in turn, we then identify common features shared by all and examine these key features in light of research-informed best practices. By applying lessons from research to findings from current practice, we are able to identify several principles for the future direction of technical assistance, particularly in the field of educator compensation reform.

So, what research base can we draw upon to identify principles for future practice? First is a focus on how people learn and how successful training is best approached, since technical assistance—in a nutshell—is teaching.<sup>20</sup> Second is a focus on the nature and history of performance pay reform—that is, how the specific characteristics of this reform influence the types and quality of technical assistance that are and could be provided. Finally is the discussion of other challenges to successful technical assistance, particularly those presented by the organizational features so common to public education systems.

### How people learn and implications of performance pay reform

Those who study technical assistance and training initiatives offer insight to common barriers that may hamper successful and sustained learning by trainees. Too often, training for adults is not sufficiently learner centered, knowledge centered, assessment centered, or community centered.<sup>21</sup> It often falls short of tailoring training to the needs of participants, providing a conceptual framework to embed new learning, establishing feedback loops, or developing participants' abilities to recognize their own learning strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, training efforts often operate without much regard to the realities of school work environments or focus on teachings that are perceived as impractical or irrelevant by educators, both of which deteriorate long-term learning.<sup>22</sup>

But learning through technical assistance does not occur in a vacuum—technical assistance providers must also tailor their practices in light of the policy context, the work environment of schools, and the nature of educators. As discussed previously, current performance pay initiatives stem from a long history of educator compensation reform in the U.S. public school system. This history offers both benefits and challenges to technical assistance providers' efforts.

Perhaps the most daunting challenge is related to one of the core principles of learning—that is, preconceived notions about an issue greatly influence how people learn.<sup>23</sup> Over the decades educators have developed opinions about “performance pay” that may or may not be grounded in the realities of how a specific program operates. As one of our interviewees who works with Q Comp participants stated, “we often have to work on dispelling the myths” of performance pay. Certainly any given program may or may not result in some of the common fears held by performance pay opponents—for example, dismantling the collaborative culture of schools, or encouraging teaching to the test—but educators often hold these fears because of their preconceived notions of performance pay and not because of any specific experience in a program itself.

In a recent evaluation of the first year of Texas' state-funded performance pay program, educators from school districts not participating in D.A.T.E. often cited the belief that program participation would be detrimental to school culture and professional collegiality. Ironically, in those districts participating in D.A.T.E., educators explained that they were



drawn to the program because of the promise it held for improving student learning and instruction.<sup>24</sup> These contrasting opinions are—at least to some extent—shaped by preconceived notions rather than any past experience in the D.A.T.E. program specifically.

Fortunately, because of the history of performance pay and other educator compensation reform initiatives, technical assistance providers can also learn from the lessons offered by past experiences. Several recent reports summarize these lessons well, lending insight for important topics of technical assistance and identifying obstacles that often plague program implementation.<sup>25</sup>

For example, it is largely believed that performance pay programs benefit from setting clear and nonpunitive goals, securing union-district cooperation, developing systemic organizational capacity, using multiple evaluation measures, and engaging teachers early on. Common challenges have included the highly technical nature of accurately measuring teachers' contribution to student performance, often-held doubts about funding stability, and hasty expectations for program outcomes. Forecasting these opportunities and challenges as part of a technical assistance effort can facilitate sustained learning by those participating in the programs and ultimately benefit the implementation of a performance pay system.

#### Other challenges for technical assistance

The organizational dynamics of schools and the nature of educators' work also present opportunities and challenges for technical assistance providers. It can be argued that recent initiatives—for example, professional learning communities and peer observations—have pushed schools away from the “egg crate” style of instructing students in isolation and toward a more teacher-involved, democratic approach to running schools. However, the long-standing and entrenched operation of teaching and learning in schools still presents challenges to the success of technical assistance initiatives. Centralization of change efforts within organizations among principals and administrators, along with insufficient sharing of authority among all ranks of school employees are key barriers to the ultimate goal of sustained and systemic organizational learning.<sup>26</sup>

Daily work demands, time pressures, and inadequate technical capacity within an organization are other common challenges that technical assistance providers must expect. Certainly, few would argue that educators have much time to spare, at least without significantly restructuring the use of time in schools, to learn how to implement new initiatives such as a performance pay program. And not many would assert that all schools or districts have the technical capacity—such as data systems or manpower—to implement performance pay programs on a broad scale. While not necessarily making the jobs of technical assistance providers any easier, understanding these realities allows them to more strategically address these issues through training.

Technical assistance providers must acknowledge the realities of performance pay reform, recognize common barriers to meaningful training, and tailor their teaching to meet the needs of public school work environments.

We argue that technical assistance providers must acknowledge the realities of performance pay reform, recognize common barriers to meaningful training, and tailor their teaching to meet the needs of public school work environments and trainees. In other words, technical assistance providers should ultimately strive to make work environments more suitable and trainees—in this case, primarily educators—better equipped for sustained learning in order to make performance pay part of a long-term avenue for school improvement.

# Findings from technical assistance initiatives

This section examines each program’s technical assistance offerings. Overall, we learn much about the focus of these initiatives, common strategies for delivery, and insight into the future direction of technical assistance, especially as it relates to performance pay. A summary of the key technical assistance features of the three programs studied is provided in Table 2 and further discussed at the end of this section.<sup>27</sup>

## Technical assistance for the Teacher Advancement Program

As the Teacher Advancement Program moves into its second decade of implementation, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching’s technical assistance offerings for the program have become a well-established component of the program’s operation. NIET is an organization committed to establishing a high-quality, competitively compensated, and equitably distributed workforce of teachers throughout the nation’s K-12 education

**TABLE 2**  
**Key features of technical assistance for performance pay programs**

Overview of TAP, Q Comp, and D.A.T.E.

Features of tech assistance	TAP	Minnesota’s Q Comp	Texas’ D.A.T.E.
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources for current and prospective participants</li> <li>Raising awareness about performance-based pay, broadly</li> <li>Implementation of TAP model; performance pay <i>not</i> necessarily central issue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources <i>primarily</i> for current participant needs</li> <li>Navigating grant application process</li> <li>Implementation of Q Comp; performance pay <i>not</i> necessarily central issue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources for current and prospective participants</li> <li>Navigating grant application process</li> <li>Implementation of D.A.T.E.; performance pay is central issue</li> </ul>
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prescribed model and customized training, some required</li> <li>Face-to-face, on-site technical assistance</li> <li>Real-time, readily accessible electronic resources</li> <li>Assistance is ongoing with early implementation focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customized training, none required</li> <li>Primarily face-to-face, on-site technical assistance</li> <li>Some electronic resources</li> <li>Assistance is ongoing with early implementation focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prescribed model and customized training, some required</li> <li>Face-to-face, on-site technical assistance</li> <li>Real-time, readily accessible electronic resources</li> <li>Assistance is ongoing</li> </ul>
Evolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing use of practitioner-to-practitioner sharing</li> <li>Advancing online learning opportunities</li> <li>Targeting classroom teachers more directly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing use of practitioner-to-practitioner sharing</li> <li>Targeting broader set of stakeholders more directly, including classroom teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing use of practitioner-to-practitioner sharing</li> <li>Advancing online learning opportunities</li> <li>Increasing focus on technical details of performance pay.</li> </ul>

system. Their primary work is ensuring the effective and sustainable implementation of the TAP system, which provides a model for systemic teacher quality reform and is organized around four components: multiple career paths for teachers, ongoing applied professional growth for teachers, instructionally focused accountability, and performance-based compensation. The assistance provided by NIET is for all participant sites, but they also actively reach out to prospective participants. While performance-based pay is a key element of any TAP system, technical assistance for the program uses a holistic approach—assistance in developing and using performance-based pay is approached as part of the larger, systemic reform undertaken at a TAP site.

### Focus of TAP technical assistance

TAP technical assistance focuses on two issues: raising awareness of the TAP model and performance-based pay broadly, and educating participants about TAP implementation. The former includes outreach to both participants and nonparticipants alike, while the latter involves in-depth training primarily for leadership teams at TAP sites.

National TAP conferences are held each year and provide an opportunity for prospective participants and current participants alike to learn about strategies for implementing TAP successfully and improving teacher effectiveness. Additionally, NIET is currently raising national awareness about federal funding opportunities geared toward teacher effectiveness and compensation reform, such as the Race to the Top Fund, Investing in Innovation Fund, and Teacher Incentive Fund.

However, the core of NIET's technical assistance is focused on participant sites and includes multiple training opportunities. Some are required, while others are optional; some focus on implementation, while others provide summative reviews of program success.

Each TAP site is required to participate in three training courses focused on keys to successful program implementation: (1) Preparing for Success in a TAP school, (2) Preparing to Become a Certified TAP Evaluator, and (3) Becoming a Certified TAP Evaluator.<sup>28</sup> These courses involve multiple, consecutive days of intensive training with leadership teams, which include school principals, master teachers, and mentor teachers. Master teachers lead cluster groups and provide demonstration lessons, coaching, and team teaching to career or traditional classroom teachers. Mentor teachers are supported and guided by the master teacher to help and give feedback to career teachers.

The first course takes place prior to the start of the school year and acquaints the leadership team with the key ingredients for successful implementation of TAP, including detailed training on the roles and responsibilities of each leadership team member. The other courses take place during the first year of TAP implementation. They focus on training and certification, respectively, for master and mentor teachers to effectively use

TAP’s research-based instructional rubric, known as “Teaching Skills, Knowledge and Responsibilities Performance Standards.” This is a foundational component of the TAP model that guides teacher evaluation and instructional improvement and is used as a tool for both collaborative teacher meetings and one-on-one coaching.

Other optional trainings are available to TAP participants. NIET or a partner state-district provides a Start-Up of School workshop for implementing sites, which orients the entire school faculty (not just the leadership team) to TAP before students return for the year. TAP Summer Institutes are widely popular and provide intensive training to school leadership teams. The workshop-style approach of these institutes allows participants to work on skill application rather than simply focusing on abstract ideas about the TAP model.

NIET holds multiple institutes nationwide each summer, lasting anywhere from three to five days, and addressing topics that are determined by TAP participant needs. In 2008, for example, institutes were held in Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas.

TAP sites can receive ongoing school-based support from NIET through either a district or state TAP coordinator or multiple visits from a national TAP program specialist. The former is a specific personnel position created by a district or state who receives formal training from NIET, including one- to two-day workshops three to four times throughout the school year depending on specific needs at individual sites.

Finally, NIET provides school review and evaluation services. These entail annual data collection at the school level by NIET, including principal and teacher surveys with the intent of providing participants with feedback on their compliance with the TAP model.

Overall, the trainings and related services for participants are focused heavily on two components of the TAP model: (1) instructionally focused accountability and (2) ongoing applied professional growth. The first component is a comprehensive approach for evaluating teachers’ performance using TAP standards (TAP “Teaching Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibilities Performance Standards”) and value-added calculations. Evaluation results are also used to inform ongoing professional development for teachers.

Overall, the instructionally focused accountability system helps teachers understand what it is that makes them an effective teacher; that is, it raises their “consciousness of practice” and makes best practices within a school more universal. The TAP evaluation process also helps teachers identify areas of weakness and provides them with the support and resources to improve. This occurs with the leadership of master and mentor teachers, trained extensively by NIET to evaluate teachers and lead effective collaborative teacher meetings, or cluster meetings based on evaluation results.

While NIET favors face-to-face, onsite technical assistance, they have diversified their tools for training, primarily by building a prominent online presence.

More specifically, master and mentor teachers are trained to lead groups of classroom or career teachers through data analysis and draw out applications for instructional practice. NIET also raises master and mentor teachers' awareness about the adult learning process, which is critical to conducting successful cluster meetings.<sup>29</sup>

NIET understands that the successful implementation of instructionally focused accountability and ongoing applied professional growth has implications for performance-based pay (one component of the TAP model). For example, a large portion of performance-based awards for teachers is determined by their instructional performance. Therefore, successful and effective use of the TAP instructional rubric, cluster meetings, and one-on-one coaching will provide a fair system upon which performance-based pay is determined. TAP has also been heralded for its attention to aligning teacher compensation to other school system goals, specifically to human resource practices such as teacher hiring decisions and professional development.<sup>30</sup>

#### Delivery of TAP technical assistance

While NIET favors face-to-face, onsite technical assistance, they have diversified their tools for training, primarily by building a prominent online presence. The previous section painted an overview of the key topics addressed by NIET, most of which are delivered through in-person strategies. The required core trainings for TAP leadership teams and TAP Summer Institutes take on a more personalized workshop approach, while national conferences deliver information in a much larger, but still in-person, setting. All of these delivery mechanisms group practitioners with practitioners and promote meaningful sharing of information.

With that said, NIET has also developed a notable online presence to supplement the face-to-face experience and provide readily accessible and real-time learning tools. The NIET website, for example, includes information tailored to both current and prospective participants. It includes an online strategies database, allowing practitioners to readily access and submit successful instructional strategies utilized by master and mentor teachers in TAP schools. There is also a section dedicated specifically to the role of principals in a TAP school. For prospective TAP sites, NIET provides detailed overview of the TAP model, frequently asked questions, and logistics for implementing TAP. The website also highlights case studies of TAP operating nationwide.

In addition to the TAP website, NIET has created numerous sources of information that can be accessed electronically, such as a DVD series ("Teaching Episode Library"), the TAP Leadership Handbook, and the TAP Implementation Manual. As will be discussed in subsequent sections, NIET also plans to advance its online training tools with a forthcoming training portal.

The timing of technical assistance, not solely the means of delivery, is another important NIET consideration. While NIET provides ongoing assistance to TAP participants, much of their training is front loaded. They describe the first critical point for technical assistance as preparing a school for its first year of implementation—addressing the necessary logistics, systems, and capacity for TAP implementation. For example, NIET has found that the master-to-career teacher ratio is critical to successful implementation. The second critical point is early training for master and mentor teachers, as they facilitate and lead their schools through the core components of TAP. NIET certainly provides ongoing assistance and feedback to participants throughout their implementation experience, but early training on key elements for success is critical.

### Evolution of TAP technical assistance

NIET continually adapts training initiatives and resources to TAP participants' needs. This evolution is guided by systematic and regular surveys of participants and the institutional experience they have built during the past decade of implementation. As an NIET official explained, "We do not have to discover this along with schools." Meaning, the institutional knowledge of a decade's worth of work gives NIET a lot of substantiated evidence upon which to guide their technical assistance offerings.

At the same time, because TAP is heading into its second decade of operation, some training resources need to be updated to address the needs of current participants. Most evidently, NIET is creating an online training portal, expected to roll out in spring 2010. This online portal will provide training modules focused on application of effective TAP strategies and tailored to various school personnel—modules for master teachers, modules for mentor teachers, and modules for career teachers.

The impetus for this new online venture was threefold. First, it is a more efficient way of reaching a broader group of participants. Second, it allows participants to access resources at a time convenient to them. But perhaps most notably, it is the first time that NIET is able to *directly* train career teachers. The TAP technical assistance model traditionally relies on master and mentor trainers to transfer learning to career teachers. The online training portal is an avenue for career teachers to receive first-hand training from NIET, an effort to supplement—not supplant—the training initiatives well established for TAP sites.

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### Technical assistance for Minnesota's Quality Compensation Program

Minnesota's Quality Compensation program is modeled after TAP and, not surprisingly, many of the topics addressed by its technical assistance initiatives are similar to those described above. However, there are several fundamental differences between the

assistance provided by the Minnesota Department of Education and that offered by NIET. The following sections discuss key features of Q Comp’s technical assistance offerings, highlighting key similarities and differences between the MDE and NIET approaches.

### Focus of Q Comp technical assistance

The primary focus of MDE’s technical assistance offerings is on program participant needs, specifically on how to navigate the grant application process and how to implement Q Comp. Unlike TAP, there is no requirement for technical assistance participation because, as MDE explained, “Minnesota is a strong local control state.” Therefore, MDE can only highly recommend technical assistance but a district can participate in Q Comp with or without receiving training.

Another notable difference between Q Comp and TAP is that, while NIET uses—at least partially—a pre-established set of training courses for participants, all of Q Comp training is very customized to site needs. This is fitting since plan design is much more localized for Q Comp than the national TAP model.

This customized approach is based upon the needs expressed by Q Comp participants and MDE’s own determination of priorities. The latter are often grounded in evidence from the applications submitted by districts to the MDE explaining how they plan to use Q Comp funds. MDE takes note of the sources of concern that arise during participants’ submission of and revisions to applications. They also conduct annual program reviews, including site visits, during participants’ early years of implementation. Feedback from these reviews is a useful source for determining the specific needs of Q Comp participants.

The topics addressed by Q Comp technical assistance are quite similar to those of TAP. When asked to describe the most common technical assistance topics provided to Q Comp participants, MDE officials listed teacher evaluations and professional learning communities within schools, the latter essentially being the establishment of systems that promote meaningful teacher-to-teacher learning opportunities. These topics approximate what TAP coins as instructionally based accountability and cluster meetings, respectively. MDE officials believe these topics are most popular because they are such unfamiliar processes in the traditional operation of schools. The overview of the Q Comp program guidelines and applications process are also popular topics addressed by technical assistance.

From their experience in schools, MDE officials observed that teachers had less consistently experienced a positive and informative evaluation process or productive, meaningful teacher meetings before implementing Q Comp. MDE went on to explain that, if participants make effective use of teacher evaluations and professional learning communities, these components of Q Comp are no longer perceived with doubt but become rewarding experiences for teachers.



As with TAP, training specific to the design and implementation of performance-based pay is not as prominent on the technical assistance agenda. This is perhaps not too surprising since so much of the training is determined by needs expressed by participants. And, according to a recent state legislative auditor report, Q Comp participants described their primary reasons for taking part in Q Comp as being the desire for additional funds and the opportunity to create additional leadership positions for school personnel.<sup>31</sup> It may be that the issue of performance-based pay has not bubbled up as a topic of great concern in the early years of Q Comp operation.

Meanwhile, the matter of performance-based pay does not go without attention as a topic for technical assistance. Rather, it is currently addressed in a much more holistic way, as part of the larger strategy for reforming teacher quality. And fitting to this focus on systemic teacher quality issues, Q Comp assistance is currently directed by a division in MDE which oversees all school improvement initiatives. Therefore, implementation of Q Comp benefits from not only numerous department staff but also their specializations, including experts in academic content fields, professional development, and in school accountability (those referred to as “Adequate Yearly Progress” staff).

### Delivery of Q Comp technical assistance

As with NIET, MDE uses a mixed-methods approach to deliver technical assistance to Q Comp participants. The most prominent strategies include stand-and-deliver meetings led by MDE staff, monthly networking meetings among Q Comp participants—facilitated by MDE—webinars, and a website dedicated to Q Comp. The online presence is less developed than that of TAP, but it does provide readily available information about the nuts and bolts of Q Comp, including an overview of program components, guidelines, a rubric for the application process, and a calendar of workshops, trainings, and other Q Comp meetings. In addition to these, MDE also provides one-on-one assistance to participants on an “as requested” basis and capitalizes on statewide conferences—such as the annual Q Comp, *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, and Title I conferences—to raise awareness about the program.

When asked which delivery method seems most useful for participants, MDE described the benefits of monthly networking meetings convened at MDE. They provide an ongoing opportunity for Q Comp participants to meet with one another and learn from each other’s experiences. “They talk, problem solve, and share lessons,” explained an official with MDE.

MDE also indicated that the most critical points for delivering technical assistance to Q Comp participants are in the early stages of program design and implementation. They note that these seem to be the points at which they receive the most requests for assistance from participants. Accordingly, MDE has developed and shared examples of “model” Q Comp plans as learning tools for applicants designing their own local plans. MDE also

MDE has also moved away from a one-size-fits-all approach and toward heavy reliance on technical assistance provisions customized to the needs of Q Comp participants.

uses webinars to discuss plan design revisions required of Q Comp applicants; as MDE explained, this direct communication facilitates greater understanding by applicants as to what revisions are needed to their applications and why.

Finally, MDE emphasizes the need for a broad set of district stakeholders, especially teachers, to be made aware of the Q Comp program prior to the district's submission of an application. While Q Comp requires local union support of an application—or 70 percent teacher approval in nonunionized sites, like charter schools—before a district can receive state funds, MDE encourages participating sites to conscientiously ensure that understanding of Q Comp is not limited to a small group of key decision makers. “That way, everyone knows what’s in store,” said an MDE representative who went on to explain that, “Often a district thinks the application will be the most difficult part and then realize how tricky implementation can become.”

#### Evolution of Q Comp technical assistance

Q Comp is younger than TAP and was enacted in 2005. MDE has had less than five years of experience implementing the program. Accordingly, MDE continues to learn about the participants’ needs over time and to think more systematically about research-based approaches to assist and train them. When Q Comp was signed into law, MDE explained that it was not “truly ready to implement the program. They had to figure out what it was about.” But over time, MDE continues to learn what technical assistance offerings and strategies work best for Q Comp participants.

First, MDE has learned the importance of dispelling the “Q Comp myths.” Rumors about the program have led to inaccurate and misinformed assumptions about Q Comp. This is an ongoing issue that MDE tries to address. Even a recent evaluation of Q Comp by Hezel Associates pointed out that awareness of Q Comp and its components has become less accurate over time among nonparticipants.<sup>32</sup>

MDE has also moved away from a one-size-fits-all approach and toward heavy reliance on technical assistance provisions customized to the needs of Q Comp participants. This effort has been accompanied by decreased reliance on stand-and-deliver trainings led by MDE officials and the increased use of colleague-to-colleague sharing among program participants. As described previously, monthly networking meetings facilitate this colleague sharing and enable colleagues to draw on each other’s experiences in implementing their own Q Comp plans.

Finally, MDE is making efforts to ensure greater dissemination of training to all ranks of practitioners within participating districts. The early reliance on stand-and-deliver sessions meant that a district typically sent one representative to gather information and return to share it with others. Meaningful learning through training varied greatly from

district to district. Now, as MDE makes greater use of webinars, it has a broader, direct reach to multiple stakeholders within a Q Comp district.

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## Technical Assistance for Texas' D.A.T.E. Program

While TAP and Q Comp aim at improving teacher quality through a model integrating multiple components—with only one component being performance-based pay—Texas' District Awards for Teacher Excellence Program is highly focused on the development of performance-based pay within participating districts. Accordingly, the technical assistance provided primarily by the University of Texas System's Institute for Public School Initiatives is highly focused on the intricacies of performance-based pay. However, the strategies for providing this assistance in many ways mirror those used for TAP and Q Comp.

### Focus of D.A.T.E. technical assistance

Districts receiving D.A.T.E. funds to implement a performance pay plan are required by the Texas Education Agency to take part in technical assistance provided by the Institute for Public School Initiatives. In the year prior to implementing their D.A.T.E. plans, districts must send a team of at least two individuals to participate in at least one regional workshop. TEA recommends that these team members broadly represent district stakeholders, and include individuals such as a district planning committee representative, local school board member, superintendent, instructional leader, teacher, principal, grant writer, or other staff member responsible for implementing D.A.T.E. A list of regional workshops from which to choose includes the following:

- Ways to structure an effective and meaningful performance award system.
- Research-based evidence on elements of an effective incentive program for teachers.
- Assessment of data capacity and building the information technology infrastructure to support a performance pay plan.
- Calculation of student gains and value-added modeling.
- Stakeholder engagement and communication.
- Program guidelines, implementation, and sustainability.

IPSI offers numerous trainings and resources in addition to the required workshops. A review of topics addressed by webinars, optional workshops, conferences, and other online tools reveals a focus on four broad themes: (1) overview of grant requirements and application process; (2) resources for designing local performance pay plans; (3) managing implementation of a D.A.T.E. plan, including stakeholder engagement, data management systems, and leadership responsibilities; and recently, (4) guidance on the pay-out of bonus awards—as first-year D.A.T.E. districts had to distribute bonus awards in October 2009. The following section discusses how training and assistance related to these topics are delivered to current and prospective D.A.T.E. participants.

## Delivery of D.A.T.E. technical assistance

As with TAP and Q Comp, technical assistance for D.A.T.E. is delivered through multiple methods, combining face-to-face interaction and readily accessible online tools. In addition to the required workshops highlighted previously, other examples of in-person assistance include onsite visits, training through regional Education Service Centers, and annual statewide conferences. These sessions not only allow face-to-face interaction between IPSI and D.A.T.E. participants but also allow participants to learn from one another in a setting removed from workplace distractions.

IPSI has also developed an information-rich website connecting current and prospective program participants to numerous technical assistance resources. The website includes topics such as an overview of D.A.T.E. requirements and components; timeline of important dates for application and implementation; news and current events related to D.A.T.E.; an extensive list of frequently asked questions; a calendar of workshops and webinars; case studies from D.A.T.E. participant experiences; model D.A.T.E. plans; and a Performance Measure Database. This final online tool provides specific examples of performance measures that could be used to evaluate school employees' contribution to student achievement. Examples are specific to grade levels and personnel positions—such as classroom teachers versus noninstructional staff. It also outlines important considerations when deciding on performance measures for a D.A.T.E. plan, including district capacity—for instance, data management systems—grant funding levels, and baseline performance in the district's schools.

Technical assistance for D.A.T.E. is ongoing and, as one technical assistance provider explained, IPSI tries to cycle topics for participants so they receive timely training relevant to their current phase in the program. In other words, IPSI tries not to overwhelm participants with everything “from the cradle to the grave” at once. While prospective and current participants have access to resources that cover topics from the grant application to bonus award payouts, IPSI has rolled out workshops and webinars to address topics relevant to each phase of program participation.

For example, during the fall 2009 semester, IPSI offered distinct training opportunities for districts entering their second year of D.A.T.E. implementation and for those just preparing to enter the program. For the former group, workshop and webinar topics included reflecting on the successes and challenges of first-year implementation and considerations for first-year bonus award payouts to school personnel. Forthcoming D.A.T.E. participants had access to trainings on topics such as the purpose of D.A.T.E. and how to design a performance pay plan. Interestingly, several workshops and webinars also provided topics tailored to the needs of large versus small districts.

IPSI is doing a great job of gathering feedback from D.A.T.E. participants, synthesizing it, and distributing “lessons learned” back out to districts.

## Evolution of D.A.T.E. technical assistance

Of the three programs highlighted in this report D.A.T.E. is the youngest and, not too surprisingly, technical assistance is continually evolving to meet the emerging and changing needs of program participants. Since the kick-off of D.A.T.E. technical assistance during the 2007-08 school year, several notable adaptations have taken—or are taking—place.

First, IPSI brought Battelle for Kids in as a partner at the end of 2008. BFK is a national not-for-profit organization with vast and highly specialized consulting experience in field of education. Their areas of specialization are highly suitable to D.A.T.E. and include the design and implementation of “value-added analysis, formative assessment, strategies for recognizing and rewarding teaching effectiveness, and performance management systems.”<sup>33</sup>

While IPSI has been strong on front-end assistance for participants—navigating grant requirements, designing performance pay plans, building stakeholder buy in—the addition of BFK has brought increased assistance for the details of program implementation—using performance measures to evaluate school personnel, calculating bonus awards, and navigating logistics of bonus award payouts. Developing evaluation measures and calculating bonus awards continue to be specific areas identified by BFK in which D.A.T.E. participants need greater learning resources and assistance.

Additionally, IPSI has made a push to provide D.A.T.E. participants with more opportunities to learn from one another. One BFK official explained that IPSI is doing a great job of gathering feedback from participants, synthesizing it, and distributing “lessons learned” back out to districts. IPSI has also included practitioners on panels at D.A.T.E.-related conferences and workshops to enhance sharing of “real” experiences.

Finally, BFK continues to work with IPSI to make information dissemination even more palatable for current and prospective D.A.T.E. participants. Specifically, they are advocating greater use of online video space, online learning portals, and dissemination of DVDs to D.A.T.E. participants—all giving practitioners more readily accessible resources to learn from one another.

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## Key features of technical assistance

Key features of technical assistance provided for the three performance pay programs we studied can be grouped thematically around four broad topics: (1) the focus of technical assistance, (2) the timing of technical assistance, (3) strategies for delivery of assistance, and (4) the evolution of assistance over time. Table 2, presented earlier, provides a brief summary of these key features which are discussed in greater detail below.

Technical assistance providers explained the importance of reaching participants early on to address design and capacity issues.

## Focus of technical assistance

While technical assistance associated with TAP and Q Comp addresses performance pay less directly than D.A.T.E., the three providers similarly convey their training. First, they all—some more than others—offer a framework for understanding the significance of performance pay training. They give the training meaning by instilling program participants with a sense of why training matters. For TAP and Q Comp, program participants learn how performance pay is one component of a systemic effort at improving teacher quality. TAP has been praised in at least one other report for its focus on aligning reformed compensation for teachers with other district human resource policies,<sup>34</sup> and MDE officials make it clear to participants that Q Comp is “a system, not just a program.” While D.A.T.E. is much more concentrated on performance pay alone, IPSI does communicate to participants that D.A.T.E. plans should be strategically aligned to overall district goals.

While training session details may differ, NIET, MDE, and IPSI simultaneously focus on broad program information and specifics about program implementation. They wed more abstract ideas about program goals with practical guidance on implementation. Interestingly, practical training for all three programs seemingly focuses on arguably the most difficult or unfamiliar areas. For example, NIET and MDE both reported that implementation of teacher evaluations and professional growth meetings receive the most attention in training sessions. These two components are often the most difficult for participants to grasp because they are such uncommon practices in public schools.

The design of quality teacher performance measures and calculation of bonus awards are becoming ever-increasing topics for training among D.A.T.E. participants. As a BFK official explained, these elements of a performance pay program are “highly technical and districts often don’t have a grasp on what data they do have and its capabilities.”

## Timing of technical assistance

Technical assistance providers for all three programs indicated that their assistance provisions tend to be “front loaded.” That is, their efforts at training program participants are heaviest in the early stages of design and implementation. For TAP, Q Comp, and D.A.T.E. alike, technical assistance providers explained the importance of reaching participants early on to address design and capacity issues essential for successfully implementing their respective programs. As BFK put it, sometimes districts “don’t know what they don’t know,” which can have negative consequences for later stages of implementation.

IPSI has found that some D.A.T.E. districts planned on using performance measures that would be completely impractical, such as value-added measures for individual teachers in the first or second grade. MDE officials also relayed that Q Comp districts

often believe the application will be the most challenging part and then realize how tricky program implementation can be because they did not know what to expect early enough in the process.

With that said, technical assistance providers certainly do not neglect participants' needs in later stages of implementation. Required training courses for TAP participants fall prior to and during the first year of implementation, but optional assistance and workshops—such as TAP Summer Institutes—are ongoing for participants at any stage of implementation. Similarly, incoming D.A.T.E. districts are required to take part in one of IPSI's workshops, but numerous training resources and workshops are also tailored to the changing needs of participants at different stages of program involvement.

Finally, MDE officials provide customized assistance to Q Comp districts at their request, but note that these requests typically fall during the phases of program application and early implementation. Still, a recent evaluation of Q Comp by the state legislative auditor did recommend that MDE require veteran Q Comp districts to take part in annual program reviews, which are required of incoming participant districts.<sup>35</sup>

### Strategies for delivery of technical assistance

All three programs showed several similarities in how they packaged technical assistance and how they disseminated it. In fact, all three programs benefit from a mixed-methods approach employed by technical assistance providers.

First, staff use a combination of required versus optional assistance and one-size-fits-all versus customized trainings. TAP and D.A.T.E. participants must take part in a predetermined set of workshops, which NIET and IPSI, respectively, believe address the fundamentals and skills educators need to design and implement programs effectively. From that point on, technical assistance is available at any point in time, but it is not required and it is much more tailored to the specific requests and challenges of a participant site.

MDE has less discretion in requiring training participation given the strong “local control” sentiment of public education, expressed by staff at MDE. But MDE is still able to enforce quality control in program design through the participants' application process. MDE provides all applicants with a standard rubric highlighting core components for a Q Comp plan and can require revisions to plan design prior to a district implementing their plan.

While officials with NIET, MDE, and IPSI expressed a preference for in-person training located away from the workplace distractions of schools, they have all developed a strong online presence as well. In-person training for program participants was described as being an indispensable component of technical assistance, as it allows for meaningful conversation and sharing of lessons learned not only between trainer and trainee but between

practitioners as well (trainee to trainee). And technical assistance providers are more able to facilitate training among teams of individuals from participant sites through in-person sessions. However, technological advances—such as with the use of live webinars—has made this team approach possible even at a distance.

The development of a strong online presence has been a great supplement to in-person, team-focused technical assistance, according to representatives from NIET, MDE, and IPSI. Providing individuals with online tools—such as learning portals, strategy databases, and other guiding documents—allows educators to quickly access support with relative ease and when convenient. Additionally, these online resources allow technical assistance providers to reach a broader set of stakeholders than are otherwise targeted through team-centered, in-person training sessions. As NIET explained, they are now able to provide training directly to classroom teachers through a greater online presence, particularly their up-and-coming learning modules.

They all strive  
to ensure  
practitioners can  
learn from one  
another.

#### Evolution of technical assistance

Before we turn to recommendations, we'd like to identify how technical assistance for performance pay reform is evolving. That is, what are the strategies that providers think need greater attention and effort? Before answering that question, we need to point out an obvious, but perhaps easily overlooked lesson—providers of technical assistance need to learn *how* to evolve their practices to participants' needs. This involves establishing systematic means to gather feedback from participants about their program experiences, to learn early on what preconceived notions participants hold about performance pay, and to understand what participants need to transition from the desire for program participation to actual implementation. The technical assistance providers we studied knew to expect a learning curve, especially in places like Minnesota and Texas where providers essentially had to learn along with program participants how to design and implement programs.

With this in mind, there seem to be two common and prominent evolutions NIET, MDE, and IPSI are making. First, they all are striving to ensure practitioners can learn from one another. One MDE official explained how much educators value learning from each other's experiences. Whether allowing practitioners to serve as workshop or conference panelists or creating online portals where educators can share strategies with one another, technical assistance providers are learning that their role as "facilitator" of training is just as important as directing it.

Second—and as briefly mentioned before—technical assistance initiatives are more often delivered in ways to directly reach classroom teachers and other local-level personnel. Career teachers or classroom teachers in TAP schools were never traditionally the focus of technical assistance initiatives. Rather, NIET assumed the train-the-trainer



approach and relied on leadership teams to convey pertinent information and skills to classroom teachers. However, all TAP teachers will receive direct technical assistance with the new online training portal.

IPSI's partnership with BFK has provided D.A.T.E. participants with greater access to experts onsite to figure out the fine details of implementing performance pay plans, particularly working with the intricate nature of data systems necessary to manage performance pay successfully. And this matter is not going under the radar in Minnesota, either, where the recent state legislative auditor report of Q Comp pointed out the need for teachers to receive more direct support to manage the demands of program participation.<sup>36</sup>

# Recommendations for technical assistance policy and practice

This paper closes by applying research on the promise and pitfalls of technical assistance to those key practices employed for TAP, Q Comp, and D.A.T.E. programs. The ultimate goal of technical assistance providers—whether in performance pay or not—is to provide trainees and organizations with the skills, competencies, and capacity for sustained learning and quality program implementation. With this in mind—and given the lessons that we’ve drawn from research and practice—we close with a discussion of the following practical yet well-informed principles to guide future efforts at technical assistance.

- Align program and system goals.
- Address workplace barriers early on.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to know and predict participants’ needs.
- Provide meaningful training through applied learning.

Training initiatives have no footing if the performance pay program does not first align with greater system goals.

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## Align program and system goals

If the goals of a performance pay program run counter to the operations of a school system, then any efforts at improving program implementation will most likely falter.<sup>37</sup> Technical assistance must therefore address this issue head on. NIET—as mentioned several times already—has been praised as a leader in this area by helping school systems align alternative educator compensation with other human resource policy including the hiring of teachers and professional development for teachers.<sup>38</sup> And times when alignment is not explicitly addressed through technical assistance—such as with Q Comp—it is an area that does not go unnoticed.<sup>39</sup> By focusing on a shared set of goals, programs such as TAP, Q Comp, and D.A.T.E. can work in tandem rather than counterproductively with other system operations.

Ultimately, in such a well-aligned system, sustained learning through training is more probable because trainees have a framework for understanding why training matters and how it fits within their professional environment.<sup>40</sup> The lessons learned from technical assistance resonate with the demands of their workplace.<sup>41</sup> This is likely why—whether consciously or subconsciously—technical assistance providers such as NIET, MDE, and IPSE address not only the practical steps of program implementation but also impress upon trainees the broader goals of a performance pay system. Building this conceptual framework through training initiatives, which is fundamental to the acquisition of knowledge, has no footing if the performance pay program does not first align with greater system goals.<sup>42</sup>

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## Address workplace barriers early on

Numerous barriers to sustained and meaningful learning through technical assistance arise in the workplace, including work distractions and time pressures, inadequate technical capacity, unsupportive peer culture, insufficient opportunities to apply training on the job, and reform efforts that are too centrally located in the upper echelons of management. Perhaps it is no wonder that lessons taught through technical assistance have trouble taking root in the day-to-day realities of work. And as experts in the area of organizational learning have asserted, “an organization cannot wait until after a training program is over to address the transfer-of-training problem.”<sup>43</sup>

For these very reasons it makes sense that so much of technical assistance associated with TAP, Q Comp, and D.A.T.E. is front loaded. It is arguably a very efficient use of time and energy to focus on pre-implementation phases for prospective participants along with program design and early implementation for those participating in performance pay reform. The fewer early barriers to program implementation there are, the more likely participants will be able to apply lessons for quality program implementation.

The technical assistance providers we examined took several steps to help school systems minimize or eradicate these workplace barriers. NIET, MDE, and IPSI insist that some portion of assistance be in a setting away from the school building and outside of the school year. This allows educators to learn in a situation with minimal distractions from day-to-day work. Additionally, technical assistance practices are evolving to more directly target all levels of school personnel, thereby ensuring that all stakeholders—and not just the upper echelons—are engaged in the change process.

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## Establish feedback mechanisms to know and predict participants’ needs

Technical assistance must also integrate principles for meaningful and sustained learning by individuals in addition to addressing workplace barriers to sustained learning through training. Therefore, one essential component of technical assistance must be using feedback mechanisms. And these should not only be used to learn about participants’ needs but to also identify the preconceived notions held by prospective participants.

This gets at several core principles for teaching. One is that trainers must purposefully engage the pre-existing notions held by trainees.<sup>44</sup> Others have coined this initial phase of learning as “unfreezing” individuals’ pre-existing assumptions that—unless drawn out—hinders the ability of trainers to provide for meaningful and sustained learning.<sup>45</sup> This is highly relevant to the field of performance pay. As stated earlier, the long—and often contentious—history of educator compensation reform has left many educators with their own ideas as to the promises and pitfalls of performance pay.

MDE has spent much time “dispelling the myths” about Q Comp that often deter districts from participating or cause resentment among teachers in participating districts. And an official with BFK explained how an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Unless technical assistance makes districts explicitly aware of the gaps in their understanding upfront, the districts end up scrambling mid-course during D.A.T.E. implementation.

Technical assistance should also include mechanisms to gather ongoing feedback from participants throughout the course of program implementation. This is particularly pertinent to the implementation of performance pay in states such as Minnesota and Texas, where technical assistance providers often have to learn about the needs for quality implementation along with participants. An MDE official candidly stated that, “I don’t think the department (MDE) was truly ready to implement the program (when it was signed into law). They had to figure out what it was all about.”

Feedback can be gathered formally, such as through end-of-year surveys, program reviews, or with the help of independent evaluations, all of which have been employed by NIET, MDE, or IPSI. But informal mechanisms—such as maintaining ongoing communication with participants or creating opportunities for participants to share with one another—can also be effective ways to keep training relevant to participant needs. Finally, technical assistance providers can also train participants in the skills of monitoring their own success—or lack thereof—at program implementation.<sup>46</sup> By helping participants develop interim milestones and long-term goals for program success, technical assistance providers not only stay aware of participant needs but also help participants stay attuned to their own needs.

Opportunities to apply knowledge and skills learned during technical assistance can facilitate sustained and meaningful learning by program participants.

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### Provide meaningful training through applied learning

Opportunities to apply knowledge and skills learned during technical assistance can facilitate sustained and meaningful learning by program participants. As mentioned previously, work environments should provide numerous opportunities for application, but the technical assistance itself can—and should—be designed to engage trainees in active, applied learning.<sup>47</sup>

There are many examples where NIET, MDE, and IPSI have provided technical assistance through applied learning, especially on topics that are perhaps most difficult and unfamiliar to participants. Teacher evaluations and professional growth meetings seem to be the most daunting components for TAP and Q Comp participants early on, and accordingly, they have become a focal point of technical assistance initiatives. And D.A.T.E. participants are encountering the highly technical matter of evaluating teacher performance and calculating bonus awards. In turn, IPSI and BFK are working with participants on the finite, practical details and data systems necessary to successfully navigate these elements of their performance pay plans.

Lessons from TAP, Q Comp, and D.A.T.E. offer several useful strategies to integrate applied learning into technical assistance. First is the use of practitioner-to-practitioner learning. Through conversations with colleagues, the sharing of promising practices and unforeseen struggles, or the dissemination of “model” program plans—for example, IPSI’s Performance Measure Database—participants can learn through real-life examples rather than simply abstract ideas. Additionally—and with the aid of technological advancements—trainees can practice application through the use of online tools, such as BFK’s learning courses or TAP’s forthcoming training portal.

# Conclusion

In summary, this report introduces policymakers and practitioners alike to core principles for effective technical assistance to improve the quality of teacher performance pay implementation. While these principles have application beyond the realm of performance pay, they are highly relevant to the specific nature of educator compensation reform. Ultimately, we hope that lessons learned from previous and current encounters with performance pay do not go in vain but inform long-lasting and ever-improving practice.

# Endnotes

- 1 Dan Goldhaber, "The Politics of Teacher Pay Reform." In Matthew G. Springer, ed., *Performance Incentives: Their Growing Impact on American K-12 Education* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2009).
- 2 The Teacher Incentive Fund, or TIF, is administered by the U.S. Department of Education, supports efforts to develop and implement performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems, primarily based on increases in student achievement, in high-need schools. States, districts, and some charter schools are eligible to apply for five-year federal grants. TIF began in fiscal year 2006 with a first cohort of 16 grantees who have received \$132.8 million in funding to date. A second cohort of 18 grantees received TIF grants in 2007 and has received a total of \$90.1 million to date. Race to the Top stems from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and will provide states with funds to implement education reform initiatives around four primary areas of interest: enhancing standards and assessments; improving the collection and use of data; increasing teacher effectiveness and the equity of teacher distribution within school systems; and turning around low-performing and other struggling schools. Race to the Top funds are approximately \$4 billion which will be distributed to states in two phases during 2010.
- 3 James E. Ryan, "A Legal Perspective on Teacher Compensation Reform." In Matthew G. Springer, ed., *Performance Incentives: Their Growing Impact on American K-12 Education* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2009).
- 4 Jean Protsik, *History of Teacher Pay and Incentive Reform* (Washington: Educational Resources Information Center, 1995).
- 5 Joseph A. Kershaw and Roland N. McKean, *Teacher Shortages and Salary Schedules* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962).
- 6 Allan Odden and Carolyn Kelly, *Paying Teachers for What They Know and Do: New and Smarter Compensation Strategies to Improve Schools* (Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 1992). Quote by Pennsylvania superintendent, Aaron Sheeley in 1800s.
- 7 Michael Podgursky and Matthew Springer, "Teacher Performance Pay: A Review," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 26 (4) (2007): 909-950.
- 8 Victor Lavy, "Evaluating the Effect of Teachers' Group Performance Incentives on Pupil Achievement," *Journal of Political Economy* 110 (6) (2002): 1286-1317; Karthik Muralidharan and Venkatesh Sundararaman, "Teacher Incentives in Developing Countries: Experimental Evidence from India." Working Paper 2008-13 (National Center on Performance Incentives, 2008).
- 9 Paul Glewwe, Nauman Ilias, and Michael Kremer, "Teacher Incentives in Developing Countries: Recent Experimental Evidence from Kenya." Working Paper 2008-09 (National Center on Performance Incentives, 2008).
- 10 Matthew G. Springer and Ryan Balch, "Design Components of Incentive Pay Programmes in the Education Sector." In Susan Sclafani, ed., *Evaluating and Rewarding the Quality of Teachers: International Practices* (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2009).
- 11 Table 1 comes from page 5 of Matthew G. Springer, "Rethinking Teacher Compensation Policies: Why Now, Why Again?" In Matthew G. Springer, ed., *Performance Incentives: Their Growing Impact on American K-12 Education* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2009).
- 12 Matthew G. Springer and others, "Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG) Program: Year Three Evaluation Report" (National Center on Performance Incentives, 2009).
- 13 Lori L. Taylor, Matthew G. Springer, and Mark Ehlert, "Teacher-Designed Performance-Pay Plans in Texas." In Matthew G. Springer, ed., *Performance Incentives: Their Growing Impact on American K-12 Education* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2009).
- 14 William J. Slotnik, "It's More Than Money: Making Performance-Based Compensation Work" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2009); Joan Baratz-Snowden, "The Future of Teacher Compensation: Déjà Vu or Something New?" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2007).
- 15 Springer and others, "Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG) Program: Year Three Evaluation Report"; Taylor, Springer, and Ehlert, "Teacher-Designed Performance-Pay Plans in Texas."
- 16 Goldhaber, "The Politics of Teacher Pay Reform."
- 17 Information detailed in Figure 1 comes from the following sources: Robin Chait, "Current State Policies that Reform Teacher Pay: An Examination of Pay-for-Performance Programs in Eight States" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2007); Craig Jerald, "Aligned by Design: How Teacher Compensation Reform Can Support and Reinforce Other Educational Reforms" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2009); Koppich, "Toward a More Comprehensive Model of Teacher Pay"; Koppich and Rigby, "Alternative Teacher Compensation"; Office of the Legislative Auditor, State of Minnesota, "Q Comp: Quality Compensation for Teachers" (2009); Matthew G. Springer and others, "Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG) Program: Year Two Evaluation Report" (National Center on Performance Incentives, 2008); Springer and others, "Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG) Program: Year Three Evaluation Report."
- 18 After several efforts, we were unable to secure an interview with representatives at The University of Texas System's Institute for Public School Initiatives regarding their technical assistance work with the D.A.T.E. program. We did interview a representative at Battelle for Kids, an organization also involved in D.A.T.E. technical assistance.
- 19 Evaluation findings referenced in this paper come from publicly available reports.
- 20 John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking, eds., *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington: National Academy Press, 2000); Mary L. Broad and John W. Newstrom, *Transfer of Training: Action-Packed Strategies to Ensure High Payoff from Training Investments* (Cambridge: Perseus Publishing, 1992).
- 21 Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, *How People Learn*.
- 22 Broad and Newstrom, *Transfer of Training*.
- 23 Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, *How People Learn*.
- 24 Matthew G. Springer and others, "District Awards for Teacher Excellence (D.A.T.E.) Program: Year One Evaluation Report" (National Center on Performance Incentives, forthcoming).
- 25 Koppich, "Toward a More Comprehensive Model of Teacher Pay;" Koppich and Rigby, "Alternative Teacher Compensation;" Slotnik, "It's More Than Money;" Snowden, "The Future of Teacher Compensation."
- 26 Broad and Newstrom, *Transfer of Training*; John P. Kotter, *The Leadership Factor* (New York: Free Press, 1988).
- 27 Unless noted otherwise, findings discussed in this report come from the following sources. For TAP, authors drew primarily upon information gathered in interviews with a TAP official and the TAP website: Interview with program coordinator, Teacher Advancement Program, September 18, 2009 and "TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Achievement," available at <http://www.tapsystem.org/> (last accessed October 1, 2009). For Q Comp, authors drew primarily upon information gathered in interviews with Q Comp officials and the Q Comp website: Interview with program coordinators, Minnesota Department of Education, September 14, 2009 and "Minnesota Department of Education: Q Comp," available at [http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Teacher\\_Support/QComp/index](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Teacher_Support/QComp/index).

- html (last accessed October 1, 2009). For D.A.T.E., authors drew primarily upon information gather in interviews with a Battelle for Kids official and the D.A.T.E. technical assistance websites: Interview with program coordinator, Battelle for Kids, September 11, 2009; "Texas Educator Performance Awards: Recognizing Educator Performance," available at <http://portal.battelleforkids.org/texas/home.html?sflang=en> (last accessed October 1, 2009); "Texas Educator Performance Awards: Technical Assistance," available at <http://www.txeducatorawards.org/> (last accessed October 1, 2009).
- 28 Note, the titles for each core training course will be changing after the 2009-10 school year, but the purpose of each remains essentially unchanged from the description given in this report.
- 29 Jerald, "Aligned by Design."
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Office of Legislative Auditor, State of Minnesota, "Q Comp."
- 32 Hezel Associates, "Quality Compensation for Teachers: Summative Evaluation" (2009).
- 33 "Texas Educator Performance Awards: Recognizing Educator Performance," available at <http://portal.battelleforkids.org/texas/home.html?sflang=en> (last accessed October 1, 2009)
- 34 Jerald, "Aligned by Design."
- 35 Office of Legislative Auditor, State of Minnesota, "Q Comp."
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Koppich, "Toward a More Comprehensive Model of Teacher Pay;" Koppich and Rigby, "Alternative Teacher Compensation;" Slotnik, "It's More Than Money;" Snowden, "The Future of Teacher Compensation."
- 38 Jerald, "Aligned by Design."
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- 40 Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, *How People Learn*.
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- 42 Slotnik, "It's More Than Money."
- 43 Broad and Newstrom, *Transfer of Training*.
- 44 Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, *How People Learn*.
- 45 Broad and Newstrom, *Transfer of Training*.
- 46 Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, *How People Learn*.
- 47 Ibid; Broad and Newstrom, *Transfer of Training*.



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