

# Florence County School District, South Carolina Teacher Advancement Program

*The South Carolina Teacher Advancement Program (SCTAP+) involves three districts and six schools (five elementary and one high school) with more than 200 professional staff and more than 3,000 enrolled students. Current state initiatives aimed at addressing teacher and principal shortages in high-need schools have included stop-gap measures that do not build local capacity. SCTAP+, in conjunction with the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), will begin to address local capacity building and work to improve student achievement and retention/recruitment. The program will aim also to test the effects of differential compensation on retaining and recruiting effective teachers.*

## Needs Assessment Results and General Information

SCTAP+ includes Florence County School District 3 (three elementary schools and one high school), Florence County School District 1 (one elementary school) and Laurens School District 56 (one elementary school). Seventy-eight percent of the target area students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 47 percent of the area students are minority. Teacher turnover is 15 percent, which is 5 points above the state average. The project includes one high school where only 58.7 percent of students graduate; the high school has never made adequate yearly progress (AYP). The elementary schools in the project have moderate achievement levels but are marked by high achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students.

## Background

District teacher salaries are low in comparison to surrounding states that draw teachers and potential hires away. Current state initiatives have not stemmed the tide nor are they building local resources. It is in

this environment that SCTAP+ will begin to address recruitment and retention of effective teachers and principals.

## Incentives

The program immediately provides teachers with professional development, via master/mentor teachers, to begin building local capacity. The long-term strategy involves using large annual bonuses and career advancement to improve recruitment and retention for effective educators. The bonus structure for administrative teams and teachers ranges from \$500 to \$10,000. This is tied to individual student and whole-school achievement. The first performance incentives were awarded in December 2008 (for the 2007–2008 school year) for the teachers and administrators in the six TIF schools.

## Evaluation

The TAP professional development model includes an observation component that is also tied to the bonus structure. Teachers are observed by certified TAP

<b>LOCATION(S)</b>	Florence, South Carolina
<b>GRANT AMOUNT</b>	Year 1: \$1,950,250    5-year total: \$7,023,345
<b>DURATION</b>	5 years
<b>PARTNERS</b>	None

evaluators who then provide targeted feedback on instructional issues to the teacher. State teachers have indicated that this professional development-evaluation feedback loop satisfies the demand that accountability be paired with equity and support.

Anderson Research Group will conduct an independent evaluation of SCTAP+ that focuses primarily on quantitative data.

The evaluation will assess program success on several objectives:

- (1) Has educator (teacher and principal) efficacy and effectiveness increased?
- (2) Has student achievement increased one standard deviation above paired non-TAP schools?
- (3) Are all positions being filled by highly qualified teachers?
- (4) Was a self-perpetuating performance-based compensation system developed?
- (5) What impact have bonuses had on teacher and principal recruitment and retention?

## Resources

SCTAP+ will apply the Teacher Incentive Funds (TIF) to improve student achievement. The TIF grant monies will be met by local and state funds and will be reallocated at the school and district level to hire master/mentor teachers and to provide bonuses.

## Data Systems

The TAP schools in South Carolina contract with SAS data services, and Dr. Bill Sanders, to calculate value-added scores. The SCTAP director, the Informational Services director, and the local Information

Technology director work together to create student-to-teacher linkages for data reporting.

Innovative Architects has created a database for information on teacher evaluation and professional development in the six TAP schools. These data are merged with the value-added student achievement data calculated by SAS during each school year.

## Year 1 Activities

**Challenges:** Aside from typical project start-up issues, there was a feeling of isolation for the two elementary schools that were operating as the sole SCTAP+ schools in their districts. For FCSD3 schools, there was difficulty in recruiting and hiring mentor/master teachers in a small rural district where four schools already were in TAP and had taken up the pool of experienced educators. Communication among the six schools and three districts was slow to be formalized.

**Successes:** All teachers at the six SCTAP+ schools were trained in the TAP Instructional Rubric. All school leadership team members were trained as certified TAP evaluators, including the entire district instructional staff and superintendent of FCSD3. Also, FCSD3 was able to include a master teacher for special education and for related arts to enhance the core subject area expertise.

**Progress:** FCSD3 successfully recruited master teachers for the 2008-09 school year, including several from surrounding districts. Teacher turnover at the high school was down 69 percent from the previous year. Three districts' financial and leadership teams arranged to meet to encourage formal collaboration.

## **Outlook for Year 2**

The SCTAP+ member districts will meet/communicate in a timely, formal manner so that the three districts with their six participating schools will share commonalities in financial and instructional issues. (The first meeting was held August 26, 2008.)

In order to establish inter-rater reliability among certified TAP evaluators at the district and school

levels in FCSD3, the school and district leadership teams will meet to agree upon operational definitions of each of the TAP instructional rubric indicators.

The average observation scores for classroom teachers will increase during the second year of TIF2 implementation. This is directly related to teacher effectiveness and student achievement.