

Growing and Retaining Educators in Arkansas through TAP (GREAT)

Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program Grant Application

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
A. Need for Project.....	3
(i) Identifying and addressing gaps/weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities	3
(ii) Build on similar efforts to improve relevant outcomes using existing funding streams.....	6
(iii) Part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning	9
(iv) Address the needs of the target population or other identified needs	11
B. Quality of the Project Design	12
(i) Demonstrates a rationale	12
(ii) Relevant literature review, project implementation plan, and appropriate methods	14
(iii) Evaluation methods provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment.....	30
C. Quality of the Management Plan.....	32
D. Adequacy of Resources	37
(i) The likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement	37
(ii) Build local capacity that address the needs of the target population	38
(iii) Resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant	39

“The mission of Cross County School District is to educate the whole child by preparing them to be lifelong learners and responsible citizens in a global society. In order to succeed in a rapidly changing world, all students will be able to: think analytically; solve problems creatively; utilize technology appropriately; collaborate effectively; communicate articulately.”

Introduction

Recent studies challenge the notion that teacher turnover rates in rural areas differ significantly from rates in suburban and urban areas, despite previous reports identifying "rural" as a contributing factor to teacher shortages and turnover (Aragon, 2016; Lazarev et al., 2017; Sutchter et al., 2016). Instead, factors such as non-traditional teacher preparation, lack of administrative support, maximum district salaries (rather than beginning salaries), school size, and the percentage of students from low-income and diverse backgrounds have emerged as highly predictive of teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Schools in rural communities across the United States exhibit many of these predictive factors.

Cross County School District, a rural remote Local Education Agency (LEA) located in the northeastern corner of Arkansas, serves 639 K-12 students, about 10% of whom identify as racial/ethnic minorities and over 70% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. There are approximately 50 teachers split evenly between the elementary school and the high school (Arkansas Department of Education, 2023). The district has historically faced challenges recruiting and retaining effective teachers, many of which are beyond their control: lower teacher salaries, long commutes to work, and the need for educators to serve multiple roles. However, Cross County School District has prioritized a shift that they can influence – cultivating a school culture where educators collaborate and are supported to be effective. For this Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program grant, Growing and Retaining Educators in Arkansas

through TAP (GREAT) will focus on building on the work Cross County School District has done to improve their Human Capital Management System (HCMS), which includes a performance-based compensation system and career advancement opportunities (Absolute Priority 1), for the district's two high-need schools (Absolute Priority 2). Additionally, GREAT will increase the effectiveness of educators and enhance the district's ability to attract and retain capable, diverse educators who are well-equipped to teach students from diverse backgrounds, thereby reducing disparities in effectiveness both within and among schools (Competitive Preference Priority 1; Competitive Preference Priority 2).

Cross County School District seeks to build on the work it has done over the last decade to establish a more effective evaluation system based on multiple measures of effectiveness and to award teachers with performance-based compensation based on effectiveness and additional responsibility. To raise the bar even higher and provide support for areas in need of additional resources and support, Cross County School District will partner with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), a national nonprofit, to further align its human capital management system functions by implementing four core school-level strategies: 1) expand formal career advancement opportunities for effective teachers (targeted focus on instruction, new teacher induction, and character education); 2) strengthen job-embedded, collaborative professional learning opportunities for educators; 3) implement fair teacher and school leader evaluation processes that are coupled with specific and actionable feedback; 4) improve a performance-based compensation system for teachers and school leaders; and a district-level strategy: 5) advance the district vision for improvement and alignment of the HCMS. Cross County School District will use NIET's evidence-based TAP System as the base to align these five HCMS strategies and to attain project objectives of 1) increasing the effectiveness of

teachers, 2) increasing the effectiveness of school leaders, and 3) improving student academic achievement. Cross County School District is positioned for success in implementing and sustaining the project, with strong support from parents, educators, the school board, local and state policies, and a mission that values preparing children to be lifelong learners and responsible citizens in a global society.

A. Need for Project

(i) Identifying and addressing gaps/weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities

Cross County is located in the northeastern corner of Arkansas, with the nearest large city, Memphis, Tennessee, about 56 miles east. Cross County School District, one of the two school districts in the county, serves a rural community of about 3,800 residents from around 1,450 total households (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The district includes approximately 300 square miles of rural farmland, and parents of students in the district often travel to other areas for work due to limited industry and jobs in the immediate area.

Cross County School District consists of two schools, a high school and an elementary school, with administrative offices in Cherry Valley. The number of students in the district has been growing, and the district now serves the needs of students residing in various communities within the county, including Cherry Valley, Wynnee, Hickory Ridge, and Parkin. This growth in size has occurred alongside an increase in the number of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; overall, 73% of students in Cross County School District qualify for free or reduced-priced meals (compared to 59% statewide). Additionally, 18% of students in the district are homeless, six times higher than the statewide percentage (Arkansas Department of Education, 2023). Table 1 below shows additional information for each school, and provides evidence that these schools meet the TSL high-need definition (Appendix E).

Table 1. Cross County School District - School Overview

Name	Grades Served	Student Enrollment	Student % Low Income	# Teachers	# Principals
Cross County High A New Tech School	7 - 12	292	73%	26	1
Cross County Elementary Tech Academy	K - 6	347	73%	25	1

Supporting students and educators in the post-pandemic environment is a pressing need for Cross County School District. With the pandemic’s residual impact on schools, teachers, and student learning, Cross County School District is increasingly looking to adapt and prioritize school structures that cultivate safe and inclusive school cultures, maintain high standards of classroom instruction with an emphasis on student ownership, and provide social and emotional support to both teachers and students. The district has worked to create a comprehensive HCMS, investing in high-quality educator evaluation and support systems, but several factors impact its ability to create a system of continuous improvement and professional growth that strengthens educators’ abilities to close achievement gaps and support students in high-need circumstances to succeed.

Teacher Salaries/Compensation: Proponents of strategic compensation reforms argue that because individual teachers can have significant impacts on student outcomes (Lee, 2018; Lee & Mamerow, 2019), teachers should be rewarded and recognized for their performance (Springer, 2019). Yet recent analyses of teacher salary structures in more than 100 large school districts across the country shows that the majority are still using the traditional salary schedules, and only a quarter of the districts use teacher performance to determine pay raise (Nittler, 2019;

Saenz-Armstrong, 2021). Without incentives to remain in schools that serve large populations of low-income backgrounds, teachers are more likely to leave to teach in schools with higher median income levels, where teacher pay is often higher (Springer, 2019).

Due to being a small rural school district, historically, Cross County School District teacher salaries have not been competitive with neighboring larger districts. For the 2022-23 school year, beginning teachers in Cross County earned approximately \$2,000 less than beginning teachers in Wynne School District, the other school district in the county, and nearly \$5,000 less than Memphis, Tennessee first-year teachers. As a result, oftentimes effective teachers are drawn to these larger towns and cities due to higher salaries and more robust cultural and social communities. The opportunity to earn additional compensation based on effectiveness or for serving as a teacher leader are two structures that allow Cross County School District to attract and retain educators.

Declining numbers of new teachers being prepared. In the Spring of 2022, the American Association of Colleges for Teachers Education (AACTE) released its second comprehensive report highlighting the downward trend of the people completing teacher-education programs. It was also noted that alternative preparation programs have experienced a similar trend, which has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States is facing a national epidemic of untrained teachers. Nguyen et al. (2022) discuss the urgency of supporting teachers entering the profession, as U.S. schools currently employ at least 163,650 under qualified educators, teachers working without state certification or outside of their subject area. Further, studies of the effects of teacher turnover have shown that high-poverty schools serving remote rural communities rely more on lateral entry and provisional teachers to fill positions than the average school (Sorenson & Ladd, 2020). Together, these factors create a pressing need for

Cross County School District. In the past, the district primarily hired teachers who received their training from local universities. However, more recently, the district has encountered the need to train and support new teachers who come from a wide variety of preparation experiences. During the last school year only two-thirds of Cross County School District teachers were completely certified (Arkansas Department of Education, 2023).

Attracting, Supporting, and Retaining a Diverse, Effective Workforce. Research suggests that diversifying the teacher workforce can positively impact students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Additionally, student-teacher racial match has been shown to boost student academic performance (Grissom et al., 2017), lower the likelihood of chronic absenteeism and suspension (Holt & Gershenson, 2015), and increase college aspirations (Gershenson et al., 2017). In Cross County School District, approximately 4% of teachers are of color, while almost 11% of students are of color. One of the schools does not have any teachers of color. Without a strong plan for change, our students will not have a single non-white teacher during their K-6 educational experience. The district is committed to addressing the current disparity between the racial composition of teachers and that of students they serve (Competitive Preference Priority 2).

(ii) Build on similar efforts to improve relevant outcomes using existing funding streams

State policy and priorities alignment. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the alignment between key elements of the GREAT project and Arkansas education policies and priorities. In 2023, Governor Sarah Sanders proposed a sweeping education reform package called the LEARNS Act. The new law establishes literacy standards that must be met by third graders by the 2025-26 school year or students will not be promoted to 4th grade. Districts must develop plans for raising the skills of teachers to help every student reach this new requirement.

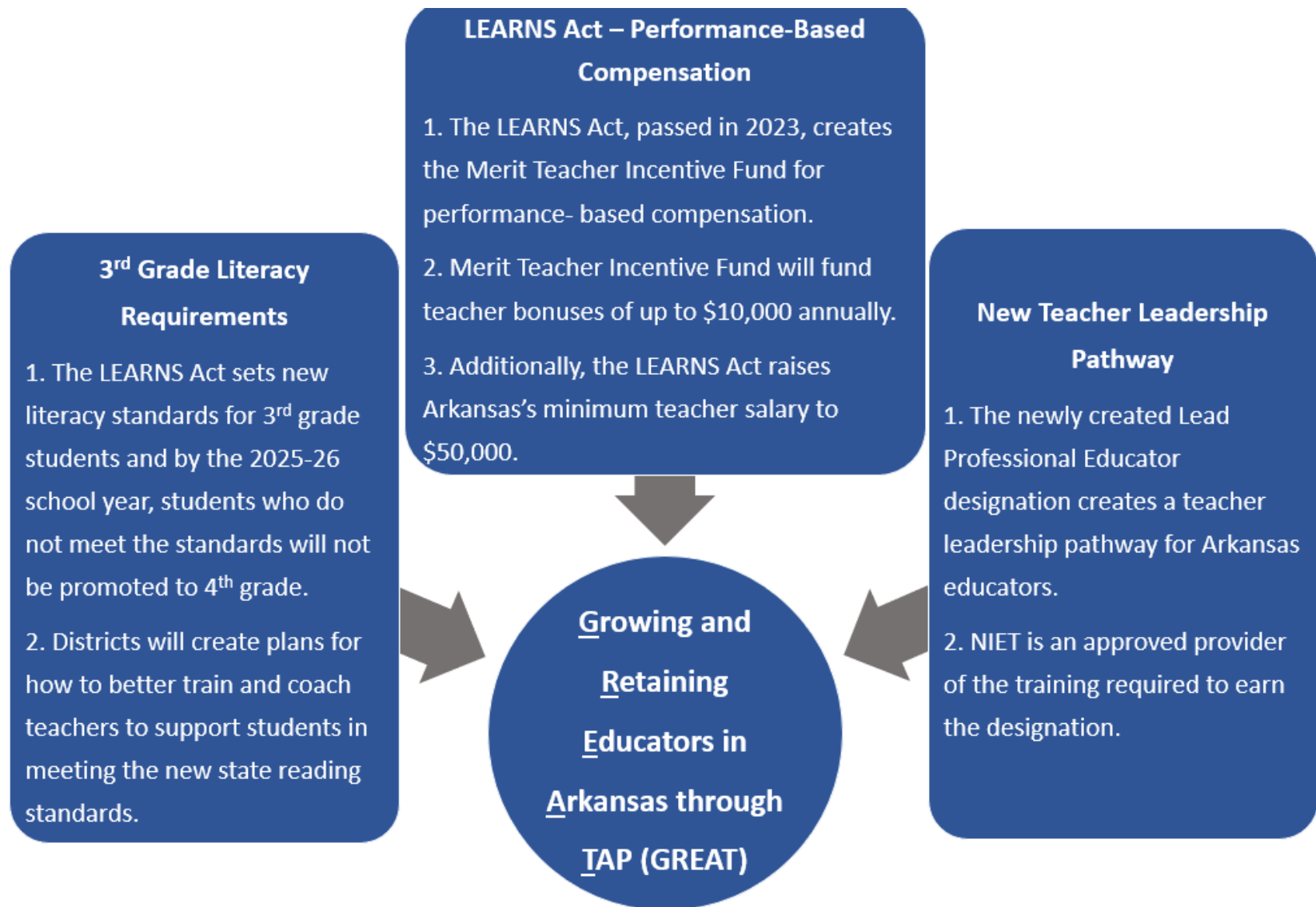
This proposal puts in place a model system that will provide an example of how to support and train teachers to meet this goal. Specifically, through the GREAT project, teacher leaders, working with school leaders, will provide the capacity and expertise to implement two strategies that research demonstrates are effective: weekly, collaborative professional learning in school-based teams, and individual classroom coaching by a trained coach or mentor. Cross County School District has put in place a system that provides more effective support for teachers. This proposal would enable the district to raise the bar even higher – with the goal of supporting every teacher to support each student in reaching proficiency in literacy by the end of third grade.

The LEARNS Act creates a Merit Teacher Incentive Fund to provide compensation for teacher bonuses of up to \$10,000 annually for teachers meeting performance standards. As the state prepares to determine the performance standards, Cross County School District, which has implemented and refined its performance-based compensation system over the years, will serve as a model for how to design performance-based compensation and can inform other districts across the state.

Finally, this proposal is closely aligned to the newly created Lead Professional Educator designation, which creates a statewide program to support districts in creating and implementing teacher leadership roles. NIET is an approved provider of training for the new teacher leadership designation and this proposal would provide support for educators to add Lead Professional Educator designations to their licenses. Further, this proposal would demonstrate how this new role can be most effectively structured and embedded in school systems, as well as how to best identify, select, train and support Lead Professional Educators.

Integrating with and building on existing community and federal investments. Over the last decade, Cross County School District has invested in some of the key elements of this

Figure 1. Key Elements of GREAT Align to Arkansas Education Policy and Priorities



project, including creating formal teacher leadership roles that allow teacher leaders to remain in the classroom and being compensated for additional responsibilities. The district has already allocated resources from local and Federal Title I and Title II funds towards these structures. However, the district seeks to use this proposal to build on current initiatives. As described by Superintendent [REDACTED] of Cross County School District in his letter of support, through this grant “the district will be able to continue to improve and support the development of effective teachers. In supporting and developing effective teachers, we believe we will better retain these effective teachers and ultimately drive student growth and achievement.”

Where Cross County School District is seeking additional support is to raise the bar even higher – demonstrating the kinds of innovative systems and structures that will enable it to 1) better train and support new teachers coming from a wide diversity of preparation experiences, and 2) further and deepen the support of school leaders, leadership teams, and teachers in developing students’ character formation. While Cross County School District currently has two master teachers who support the instructional best practices, the GREAT project will support the expansion of formal teacher leadership roles by creating two additional master teacher positions: one to support the creation of a new teacher induction model and one to support effective implementation of sustainable character education strategies that are integrated into daily teaching and learning practices. This proposal strengthens the district’s structures and training for teacher leaders to plan and deliver professional learning and individual coaching. Their success in this work will serve as a model for the state, which has created teacher designations to invest in the skills of teacher leaders.

(iii) Part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning

This proposal will support implementation of the evidence-based TAP System and use it to drive all human capital management system functions. The work of this partnership can inform the state and other districts on how to create a culture of high expectations through a coherent set of strategies that are rooted in a common vision for instructional improvement. The project will increase the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders, and improve the district's success in meeting academic goals.

Cross County School District is partnering with NIET, a national nonprofit organization with a 20-year history in developing, implementing, expanding, and continuously improving comprehensive multi-layered performance-based compensation systems and human capital management systems for teachers, principals, and other school leaders, including communities in Arkansas. This work has a strong track record of success in raising student academic achievement and closing achievement gaps for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., Barnett & Wills, 2016; Cohodes et al., 2023; Eren, 2019; Leutscher et al., in press).

Through the GREAT project, Cross County School District will continue to refine implementation of a fair, rigorous, valid, reliable, and objective process to evaluate educator effectiveness based on multiple measures of performance, including student academic achievement. The district will use performance-based evaluation data measuring student growth, classroom practice, and leadership practice to align elements of their HCMS. Professional development will be guided by ongoing analysis of student performance and teacher evaluation data; teacher and principal standards rubrics will be used across evaluation and professional development, coaching, induction, and mentoring. Teacher leader roles and responsibilities will be used to attract, develop, and retain highly effective and diverse teachers and create career

advancement opportunities based on effective performance. All elements in the system will bring coherence to the process and will be essential for teachers and school leaders to improve instruction. Together, the strategies of the GREAT project form a project design that is aimed at improving equity, teacher and leader effectiveness and, as a result, student achievement.

(iv) Address the needs of the target population or other identified needs

The GREAT project will support the needs of the Cross County School District community in multiple ways. The district needs to be able to train and support new teachers coming from a wide diversity of preparation experiences, requiring strengthening of its structures and training. To meet this need, the GREAT project will include intensive on-site support for district leaders, school leaders, and teacher leaders:

- Quarterly district leader coaching and support sessions, using the District Instructional Framework (F3) will be conducted to ensure alignment and enhancement of HCMS elements, monitor the implementation of the TAP System in schools, and cultivate stakeholder support for impactful systems change.
- Monthly school leader training and support sessions will provide comprehensive training on evaluation and leadership practices. Additionally, NIET will offer coaching support to principals to enable them to effectively plan and facilitate effective leadership team meetings and to support instructional capacity building of teachers.
- Monthly teacher leader training and coaching sessions will be conducted, with NIET offering tailored assistance to support teacher leaders in deepening their understanding of effective instructional practices. This support will enable Cross County School District teacher leaders to lead impactful professional learning sessions for teachers with varying levels of experience.

B. Quality of the Project Design

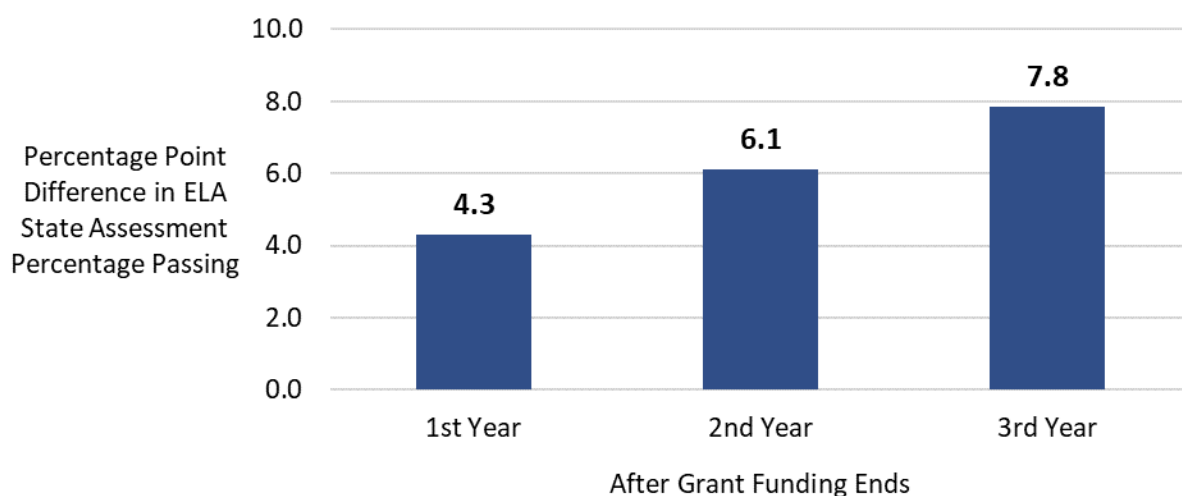
(i) Demonstrates a rationale

The rationale behind the GREAT project is that promoting equitable access to high quality educators in Cross County School District requires a dual approach: developing the skills of current educators and improving the recruitment and retention of effective and diverse educators. Cross County School District will achieve this through increased support, opportunities for leadership roles and additional compensation (i.e., Berry et al., 2010; Center for American Progress, 2014; Hudgens et al., 2020; Hudson, 2010). Building on this rationale, Cross County School District will prioritize the establishment of a cohesive HCMS structure, which involves a clear vision for improvement and a plan for continuing to build alignment across elements of the HCMS. Additionally, Cross County School District will establish systems to support educators and their professional growth through four research-based strategies that form the foundation of the TAP System and our school-level GREAT strategies: 1) expand formal career advancement opportunities for effective teachers; 2) strengthen job-embedded, collaborative professional learning opportunities for educators; 3) implement fair teacher and school leader evaluation processes that are coupled with specific and actionable feedback; and 4) improve a performance-based compensation system for teachers and school leaders. These elements are further supported by a fifth strategy at the district level, dedicated to advancing the district vision for improvement and alignment of the HCMS. Together, these strategies form a project design that is aimed at improving teacher and school leader effectiveness and, as a result, raising student achievement.

The TAP System theory of action has an extensive record of effectiveness in assisting high-need districts across multiple states in boosting student achievement. Using different

methodological frameworks, multiple researchers have consistently found positive impacts on student school outcomes when examining the effects of the TAP System in different locations (Barnett & Wills, 2016; Cohodes et al., 2023; Eren, 2019; Leutscher et al., in press; Mann et al., 2013; Schacter & Thum, 2005; Solomon et al., 2007). For example, Leutscher et al. (in press) tracked student English language arts (ELA) outcomes in a group of schools that implemented the TAP System for four years with TIF grant funding and continued implementation for three years after the grant ended. Assessed against a group of comparison schools, which were matched on school demographic and performance variables in the final year of the grant, the TAP System group significantly outperformed the comparison group each of the three post-grant years with small to medium effect sizes. Figure 2 shows the effect (percentage point difference, TAP System group minus comparison group) of the TAP System after regression adjustment for baseline differences between groups. The findings show that the TAP System’s enhancements to schools’ HCMS not only sustain improved outcomes but also continue to boost those outcomes after grant funding ends.

Figure 2. TAP System Schools Outperform Comparison Schools for Three Post-grant Years.



In their study, Eren (2019) examined the impact of the TAP System in high-need schools in Louisiana. The results indicated a statistically significant and positive effect on math achievement during the second and third year of implementing the TAP System. By the third year, the effect was reported to be “roughly equal to the observed effect from a one standard deviation increase in teacher quality” (p. 880). The author highlighted the TAP System as a cost-effective program and recommended future incentive programs incorporate elements of the TAP System. These elements include the use of multiple performance metrics (e.g., instructional practices and student performance), a combination of individual and group-based incentives, and regular feedback to teachers regarding their performance (Eren, 2019).

Cohodes et al. (2023) conducted an examination of the long-term impacts of the TAP System on eighth-grade students enrolled in South Carolina schools. The findings revealed that exposure to the TAP System during the eighth grade yielded positive impacts on long-run educational attainment. Specifically, students who experienced the TAP System had an increased likelihood of enrolling in twelfth grade and an increased likelihood of graduating from high school on time. Moreover, exposure to the TAP System also had positive social benefits, including reduced arrest rates during adolescence and early adulthood and decreased reliance on social welfare programs in adulthood. The benefits improved with more exposure to the TAP System. Overall, the analyses of the impact of the TAP System showed that “it improved longer-term educational attainment and reduced criminal activity and dependence on government assistance for young people exposed to the program” (p. 26).

(ii) Relevant literature review, project implementation plan, and appropriate methods

Relevant Literature. A review of the literature indicates the theory of action underlying the TAP System is firmly grounded in the research (for a full list of the references, see Appendix

F6). Studies conducted across multiple grade levels, locations, and years demonstrate the positive impact of the TAP System on school leader (Hudgens & Barnett, 2017), teacher (Leutscher & Barnett, 2020; Logis et al., 2022), and student (Cohodes et al., 2023; Eren, 2019; Mann et al., 2013; Springer et al., 2014) outcomes. The positive impact of the TAP System can be attributed to its four elements – multiple career paths, ongoing applied professional growth, instructionally focused accountability, and performance-based compensation (see Figure 3). These elements, both individually and as a whole, have been shown to promote educational outcomes. Research indicates adopting a comprehensive approach to school reform that prioritizes supportive structures for teachers is highly effective in improving student achievement (Park et al., 2019).

Figure 3. The Core Elements of the TAP System



Multiple Career Paths. There is a growing trend in schools to move away from traditional leadership structures and embrace an approach that involves collaboration between administrators and teacher leaders to drive instructional enhancements (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Teacher leadership roles, such as the mentor and master teacher roles in the TAP System’s multiple career paths structure, enable effective teachers to utilize their expertise

through modeling effective instruction and mentoring other teachers (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Research studies also show that teacher leadership is associated with positive outcomes for schools, teachers, and students. These outcomes include school instructional improvement, teacher job satisfaction, self-esteem, effectiveness, and retention, as well as student achievement (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020; Snoek & Volman, 2014; Supovitz, 2018). These studies provide compelling evidence for the pivotal role of teacher leadership in driving school improvement.

Ongoing Applied Professional Growth. Effective teacher professional development is key for improving instructional practices and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2022). The ongoing applied professional growth element of the TAP System adheres to the features of professional development that research has found to be effective: models effective practice, incorporates active learning, promotes collaboration among teachers, can be sustained over time, and relates to teacher needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone et al., 2002). Indeed, research shows that teacher learning and student achievement increase when professional development is teacher-led, ongoing, collaborative, and relevant for teachers (Archibald et al., 2011; Bowgren & Sever, 2010; Doğan & Adams, 2018; Hill & Papay, 2022).

Instructionally Focused Accountability. In order to improve classroom instruction, it is crucial to conduct comprehensive assessments of teachers' practices and provide high-quality feedback. Research studies show that teacher evaluation and support systems that include observation and follow-up feedback have positive effects on self-reflection and collaboration, instructional practices, and student performance (Kraft et al., 2020; Ritter & Barnett, 2016; Song et al., 2021; Therriault et al., 2020). Additionally, research highlights that for feedback to be impactful, it should be specific, actionable, and objective (Frasier, 2022; Scheeler et al., 2004;

Steinberg & Sartain, 2015; Taylor & Tyler, 2012; Thurlings et al., 2013; Tuma et al., 2018). The TAP System's instructionally focused accountability centers around implementation of evaluation systems that incorporate multiple observation and feedback cycles to enhance instructional quality and student performance.

Performance-based Compensation. PBC is a strategy within the HCMS that has been linked to improved outcomes for teachers and students (Cohodes et al., 2023; Eren, 2019; Hanushek et al., 2023; Waynet et al., 2018). A report of a Teacher Incentive Fund revealed that teachers in schools implementing PBC reported higher job satisfaction, demonstrated more improvement in observation scores, and achieved better student outcomes compared to teachers in control schools (Chiang et al., 2017). Furthermore, a meta-analysis indicated that the positive effects of teacher merit pay on student achievement were equivalent to about four additional weeks of learning (Pham et al., 2020). PBC in the TAP System aligns with the best practices identified in the literature, such as employing multiple performance measures (both individual and group/school), providing comprehensive individual feedback alongside professional development opportunities, fostering strong leadership, conducting reliable analysis of student performance, and offering substantial award amounts (Boyd et al., 2005; Chingos & West, 2012; Eren, 2019; Ritter & Barnett, 2013).

District-level Support. To achieve improvement at the school level, it is necessary for districts to redefine the role of the central office personnel as overseers to that of collaborators with educators in implementing district initiatives and goals (Bjork & Blasé, 2009). This shift allows for the building of capacity for improvement (Honig et al., 2010). Emphasizing instructional leadership at the district level has the potential to increase the effectiveness of principals (Goldring et al., 2018). Recent findings indicate that the impact of having an effective

principal on student achievement is equivalent to that of having a similarly effective teacher (Grissom et al., 2021).

Character Education. Character education is a learning process through which students and adults in a school community understand, care about, and act on core values such as respect, justice, civic virtue, and responsibility for themselves and others (Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2005). The essential purpose of character education is to equip students with the intellectual skills to make wise decisions on their own (The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues, 2022). Character education helps students develop positive personal traits and dispositions that are beneficial for lifelong success (Encalade & Staggs, 2021). Research evidence supports the importance of character education for developing student social and emotional skills (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Goldberg et al., 2019), regulating student behavior and discipline (e.g., Holtzapple et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2010;), enhancing school climate (e.g., Allensworth & Hart, 2018), and advancing student achievement (e.g., Jeynes, 2019; McCormick et al., 2021). As noted in the *Framework for Character Education in Schools* released by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2022), “In a broad sense, character education permeates all subjects, wider school activities, and a general school ethos. ... The sensible question to ask about a school’s character education strategy is not, therefore, whether such education does occur, but whether it is intentional, planned, organized, and reflective, or assumed, unconscious, reactive, and random.” Cross County School District will use this grant opportunity to intentionally use the structures of the TAP System to support character education efforts; a teacher leadership position with character education as a dedicated focus will be created to begin in the first year of the grant.

Project implementation plan. The partners in this grant have developed a high-quality

plan for project implementation and successful achievement of objectives. Project strategies will be accomplished using key activities described in detail next (see Table 2 for an overview).

Table 2. Overview of GREAT Strategies and Activities

Strategy	Key Activities
1. Expand formal career advancement opportunities for effective teachers	1.1 Expand teacher leadership roles and responsibilities; 1.2 Use teacher leader roles to attract and retain highly effective teachers and develop a leadership pipeline; 1.3 Support teacher leaders through on-site, job-embedded coaching and training
2. Strengthen job-embedded, collaborative professional learning opportunities for educators	2.1 Train instructional leadership teams to plan, deliver, monitor and improve job-embedded professional learning; 2.2 Implement weekly collaborative learning for teachers through cluster meetings; 2.3 Provide professional development for principals
3. Implement fair teacher and school leader evaluation processes that are coupled with specific and actionable feedback	3.1 Train and annually certify observers to conduct teacher and principal observations using valid rubrics; 3.2 Schedule for multiple observation and feedback cycles for principals and teachers each year; 3.3 Use observation and student data to purposefully plan professional development; 3.4 Use evaluation data to inform teacher recruitment, retention, and placement decisions
4. Improve a performance-based compensation system for teachers and school leaders	4.1 Develop recruitment incentives to recruit student interns; 4.2 Implement a teacher PBCS that is based on multiple performance metrics; 4.3 Implement a principal PBCS that is based on multiple performance metrics

5. Advance the district vision for improvement and alignment of the HCMS	5.1 Align and expand HCMS elements to advance strategic goals; 5.2 Integrate character education into HCMS improvements; 5.3 Integrate new teacher induction into HCMS improvements; 5.4 Strengthen the capacity of leaders to engage stakeholders in the systems change process; 5.5 Provide coaching for district leaders as they implement a multi-year plan for improving the HCMS
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Strategy 1: Expand formal career advancement opportunities for effective teachers. 1.1

Expand teacher leadership roles and responsibilities. Cross County School District currently has two school-based teacher leader roles: master teachers and mentor teachers. Master teachers model best practices, analyze data, lead weekly job-embedded professional learning for teachers (called cluster meetings in TAP System schools), conduct classroom observations, provide coaching and feedback, and participate in the school leadership team. Master teachers support approximately 25 classroom teachers each. Mentor teachers remain teachers of record and are provided weekly release time to support the facilitation of weekly cluster meetings, observe classroom practice, provide coaching and support, and serve on the school leadership team. Mentor teachers support approximately 12 classroom teachers. Cross County School District currently has two master teachers and four mentor teachers. The district will double their current master teacher cadre by selecting two new master teachers, one to support new teacher induction and one to support character education.

By establishing a master teacher position focused on induction, the district puts into place a key position to oversee the induction program and support a pipeline of effective educators who are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to provide effective instruction, engage in collaborative professional learning, and create learning environments that support

learning for all students. Further, establishing a master teacher position focused on character education will support the district's efforts to develop specific tools and resources to build capacity within school leadership teams to effectively implement sustainable character education strategies (Competitive Preference Priority 1; Competitive Preference Priority 2). This master teacher position will help to ensure teachers are fully supported by their leaders with the tools and best practices for integrating character into their classroom environment and instruction, and where character education is fully integrated into existing school structures and driving the schools towards their mission and vision.

1.2 Use teacher leader roles to attract and retain highly effective teachers and develop a leadership pipeline. Cross County School District will also use these leadership opportunities to recruit effective and diverse teachers who want to advance professionally without having to leave the classroom, and to develop expert teacher leaders within schools to support colleagues. With the two current master teachers nearing retirement, developing a leadership pipeline is a pressing need for Cross County School District (Absolute Priority 1).

1.3 Support teacher leaders through on-site, job-embedded coaching and training. Collaboratively, Cross County School District and NIET will provide mentor and master teachers with robust training on the observation and evaluation system, effective implementation of weekly job embedded professional learning, and leadership development. NIET will provide seven days of support in the first year of the grant and eight days of support in the second and third years. Support will be virtual and in-person to best support teacher leader learning. Master teachers and mentor teachers will also have the opportunity for additional training and collaboration with teachers from across the country during the annual NIET National Conference and the annual NIET Summer Institute. Finally, the grant will support effective teachers to add

Lead Professional Educator designations to their licenses, which was created by the Arkansas Department of Education (Absolute Priority 1).

Strategy 2: Strengthen job-embedded, collaborative professional learning opportunities for educators. (Competitive Preference Priority 1) 2.1 Train instructional leadership teams to plan, deliver, monitor and improve job-embedded professional learning. Cross County School District will work with NIET to train school leaders to lead high-functioning, school-wide Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meetings, which are essential to the success of the TAP System. The ILT, led by the principal and joined by teacher leaders, develops the school plan for improving student learning. NIET's training builds the capacity of ILTs to manage and implement research-driven practices, utilize high-impact levers for improving instruction, analyze relevant student and teacher data, lead collaborative learning teams, conduct meaningful observations, and ensure all teachers benefit from individual coaching. District leaders will participate in the trainings, since they play an important role in reviewing existing practices and expenditures to ensure that school-based, job embedded professional learning is the primary mechanism for teacher professional learning to ensure sustainability after the life of the grant (Competitive Preference Priority 1).

2.2 Implement weekly collaborative learning for teachers through cluster meetings. The project director, in collaboration with NIET, will provide intensive training for teacher leaders to enable them to provide high-quality professional learning for classroom teachers. The training and support will address immediate classroom needs. Initial TAP CORE training will occur immediately upon hiring for the two new master teacher positions, and annually as new members of the school leadership team are hired.

2.3 Provide professional development for principals. NIET will support school leaders and principal supervisors to strengthen their coaching skills beginning in Year 1 with training on the core elements of TAP. In addition to individual coaching, observation, and feedback, we will create regular collaborative learning groups for school leaders across the district. In Year 2, NIET's principal leadership training will significantly grow the capacity of school leaders to serve all students by focusing on three areas: creating and communicating a culture of equity, building shared instructional leadership, and sustaining reflective practice through continuous improvement.

Strategy 3: Implement fair teacher and school leader evaluation processes that are coupled with specific and actionable feedback. 3.1 Train and annually certify observers to conduct teacher and principal observations using valid rubrics. Cross County School District will continue to build a common understanding of strong classroom teaching that aligns with student learning growth and creates consistency in observation scores across classrooms and schools. Training will enable district leaders, school leaders, and teacher leaders to more accurately use the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric (Appendix F1) and the NIET Principal Standards Rubric (Appendix F2). Evaluators will be certified annually to ensure that they are able to provide consistent, valid, and reliable scores. The evaluator training also provides district and school leaders with a process for delivering high-quality feedback designed to impact instructional practices and student achievement. A reinforcement (area of strength) and a refinement (area of growth) are identified for teachers along with specific classroom follow-up, coaching and support so that teaching and learning are strengthened. In addition, trends in areas of growth will be used to inform the new learning provided to teachers through weekly job-embedded professional development (cluster meetings).

3.2 Schedule for multiple observation and feedback cycles for principals and teachers each year. Principal supervisors will conduct beginning, middle, and end of year conferences and complete a full cycle of two cycles of evidence/artifact collections and observations of school leaders to evaluate principal practice and provide high-quality feedback for improvement. Every classroom teacher and teacher leader will receive multiple cycles of formal observation with clear evidence of the level of teaching and learning. Within two days of the observation, an in-person post-conference provides action-oriented feedback for improvement.

3.3 Use observation and student data to purposefully plan professional development. Evaluation data from multiple measures of performance, including both teacher and student learning measures, will inform retention decisions and provide information to guide the equitable placement of effective and highly effective teachers. Cross County School District will use NIET's Educator Effectiveness Preparation and Support System (EE PASS), a web-based portal, to support analysis and tracking of evaluation data and trends (Appendix F4). Resources within EE PASS dedicated to improve educator practices and student achievement include:

- The *Content Library* contains NIET's collections of professionally filmed classroom lessons, footage highlighting execution of leadership meetings, and coaching sessions all designed to improve teacher performance. It also contains key documents, such as the TAP Implementation Manual and the TAP Evaluation and Compensation (TEC) Guide.
- NIET's *Certification module* ensures that proper training and maintenance of evaluator's skills are monitored. Evaluators are requested to recalibrate each year to ensure the evaluation tool is executed with fidelity.
- The *Collaboration and Support Center* embedded within EE PASS allows users to share uploaded documents and/or videos.

- Within EE PASS there is also an interactive data management system referred to as CODE. Cross County School District will use CODE, a Web-based system that provides secure access to real-time data and powerful analytical tools, to review numbers of evaluations completed, and calculate teacher effectiveness and performance-based compensation.

3.4 Use evaluation data to inform teacher recruitment, retention, and placement decisions.

Evaluation data will also be used to identify and recruit candidates for teacher leadership roles. Data from principal evaluations will be used to inform retention and placement decisions for leaders, as well as inform high-quality coaching and professional learning opportunities that will be differentiated based on individual needs. For school leaders, the standards for effective leaders that drive the evaluation process provide clear descriptions of leadership practices, providing a roadmap for improvement. Effective use of the evaluation systems, inclusive of high-quality coaching and support encourages teachers and school leaders to stay in the role (Competitive Preference Priority 1).

Strategy 4: Improve a performance-based compensation system for teachers and school

leaders. 4.1 Develop recruitment incentives to recruit student interns. Each year, Cross County School District will recruit highly-skilled aspiring teachers in high-need subject areas. These candidates will go through a highly-selective hiring process, targeting the most difficult to fill positions in Cross County School District. These promising pre-service teachers will receive a stipend during their semester of pre-service teaching, which will take place in Cross County School District. The selected student interns are observed using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standard and attend weekly cluster meetings. They go through the same processes as the career teachers in pre- and post-conferences. Through this partnership, the school is developing a

pipeline of effective instructors in hopes that they will choose to stay with the district and be better prepared when they have a classroom of their own.

4.2 Implement a teacher PBCS that is based on multiple performance metrics. The TAP System supports districts to use performance-based compensation for high-performing teacher leaders who lead professional learning for groups of teachers as well as provide coaching and support for individual classroom teachers in their schools. Master teachers and mentor teachers receive salary augmentations (\$7,500 and \$4,000, respectively) for taking on additional responsibilities. The use of teacher leaders allows Cross County School District to better provide all teachers with high-quality opportunities to improve their skills, which in turn, will be rewarded with performance-based compensation.

Additionally, starting in the first year of the grant, all teachers will be able to earn performance-based compensation based on multiple measures of effectiveness.

- Observation Rating (50%) is based on multiple observations using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric. A weighted average of observation ratings and responsibility indicators creates an overall, end-of-year Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibility (SKR) score for each teacher. The SKR scores range from a 1.0 (unsatisfactory performance) to 5.0 (exemplary performance) in half point increments.
- Student achievement (50%): Value-added uses annual achievement test scores as the pre-test and post-test to measure an entire year's learning. The essence of value-added assessment is simply to use gains or growth in student achievement to measure the instructional performance of teachers and schools. Cross County School District will contract with a vendor to support the calculation of value-added scores based on student performance on the state assessment. For teachers in tested grades and subjects,

individual classroom student growth will be calculated; for these teachers, classroom value-added scores will account for 20%, and the schoolwide value-added score will account for 50%. For teachers without a classroom value-added score, the district's Performance-based Compensation System Committee will explore alternative measures, or decide to use schoolwide value-added scores that account for 50% of the model.

4.3 Implement a principal PBCS that is based on multiple performance metrics. Similar to teachers, beginning in the first year of the grant, principals will be eligible to earn PBC, and it will be based on the following measures: 1) evaluation rating determined by performance on the NIET Principal Standards Rubric; and 2) schoolwide value-added score.

Cross County School District's PBCS Committee will meet regularly to provide support on the district's plan for implementing PBC, as well as for sustaining PBC with local, state, or federal funds after the grant period. For this grant, Cross County School District will partially fund (approximately 70%) of the PBC awards for teachers and principals, demonstrating their commitment to establishing a financially sustainable performance-based compensation system that creates opportunities for educator advancement and recognition.

Strategy 5: Advance the district vision for improvement and alignment of the HCMS. 5.1

Align and expand HCMS elements to advance strategic goals. Cross County School District will engage NIET to provide coaching and training for district leaders to plan for effective implementation in order to 1) assess district structures and create a plan for aligning elements of their HCMS to district goals; 2) strengthen evaluation processes to produce valid and reliable measures of teacher and principal performance; 3) identify key decision points where performance data will drive HCMS decisions including recruitment, hiring, placement, retention, career advancement, and dismissal; and 4) refine a strategic compensation plan that will advance

a more effective staffing structure and more diverse faculty in schools.

5.2 Integrate character education into HCMS improvements. Cross County School District sees a growing opportunity to strengthen the support provided to educators, so that they can help their students build a well-rounded skill set, including often less emphasized character traits such as autonomy, curiosity, judgment, reasoning, and resourcefulness. Cross County School District and NIET will work collaboratively to support teachers effectively integrating and delivering character education within the classroom environment. Programmatic solutions have offered short-term triage as schools seek to recover learning loss and navigate virtual learning situations; however, educators are needing support that will build systems centered on research-based best practices and sound teaching to embed character and social-emotional learning support within their work without adding more to their plate. Cross County School District's solution to this is to integrate character education into HCMS improvements.

5.3 Integrate new teacher induction into HCMS improvements. Supporting teacher educators requires a collaborative effort that begins at the district level. This is even more true for supporting new teachers who are making the transition from preparation to practice. A master teacher dedicated to district teacher induction efforts will support this collaborative effort, to establish structures and a network of support that builds the confidence of new teachers as professional educators. The master teacher will be responsible for program oversight where new teachers are provided with relevant experiences by bridging theory to practice, building confidence and establishing a network of support. NIET will support this work by ensuring the individuals supporting induction have knowledge of effective instructional practices, high-quality strategies to coach novice teachers, and create opportunities for collaborative learning through program design (i.e., cluster meetings). NIET

will support Cross County School District to identify current practices, areas of strength, and opportunities for improvement; establish a timeline for implementation and recommended training and consultation needs; and prioritize professional learning based on needs.

5.4 Strengthen the capacity of leaders to engage stakeholders in the systems change process. The Project Director, will be supported by NIET to bring together district and school leaders to build a vision and commitment to the systems change process. Through the Advisory Board, grant partners will facilitate stakeholder engagement and systems change, and work to engage the community in Cross County School District's vision for change. The Advisory Board will oversee the project, meeting quarterly to provide guidance and monitor the quality of implementation of the grant activities and the impact of the intervention. The Advisory Board will include: Principal Investigator; Project Director; and school leader and teacher representatives.

Additionally, a committee will be created to oversee PBC to ensure alignment of PBCS measures to the district's mission, goals, and objectives. They will also support communication to key stakeholders about how the PBCS works and how PBC will be calculated and distributed. Monitoring timely calculation and distribution of performance awards will also be the responsibility of this committee. Finally, the committee will work to identify how the PBCS works in tandem with other incentives as part of a larger HCMS strategy.

5.5 Provide coaching for district leaders as they implement a multi-year plan for improving the HCMS. District leaders will receive support from NIET in the development of an overall plan for the implementation of the TAP System. Cross County School District's Project Director will support the district leadership team, which includes staff who provide support for instruction in schools. NIET will support district leaders on a monthly basis as they

work with school leaders and teacher leaders to implement the TAP System at the school level.

(iii) Evaluation methods provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment

The project evaluation will be led by NIET's Research and Evaluation Department, a department with extensive experience supporting large-scale evaluations of education programs. The evaluator will work collaboratively to lead a formative and summative evaluation with two purposes: 1) to supply grant partners with timely data to improve the project for the populations served and 2) to assess program impacts. The evaluation plan aligns with the project's logic model stating that if programmatic structures, trainings, and supports are put in place at the district and school level to help strengthen and align district HCMS, there will be 1) an increase in teacher effectiveness, 2) an increase in school leader effectiveness, and 3) improvement in student achievement. The evaluation plan (Appendix F5) is organized around four research questions aligned with the nine Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 measures; it will serve as a working document to ensure the project is on track to meet objectives.

The project's logic model (Appendix A) will be used to communicate clearly the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes expected from the intervention. The evaluator will identify program implementation measures and data collection instruments that can be embedded into the program delivery (such as systems for tracking training session attendance and engagement) as well as data reporting systems that can be used to drive continuous monitoring and improvement of program implementation. The evaluator will track program progress and analyze fidelity of implementation (Research Question [RQ] 1: How is the project being implemented and to what extent is implementation sustainable?). Qualitative data used to assess fidelity of implementation will include program artifacts, surveys, and interviews with partners. NIET's annual school review process, which consists

of classroom, ILT, and PLC observations, will serve as one of these critical data sources for assessing fidelity of implementation and providing feedback to district and school leaders.

Each year, the evaluator will interview school and district personnel to assess perceived quality of the program and program impact. To ensure reliability and validity, interview responses will be used in combination with a review of documents and system reports. This data triangulation allows for a higher level of validity in the qualitative research process. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and coded by at least two researchers. This work, along with analyses of implementation fidelity measures, will help identify key variables that impact implementation.

Qualitative and quantitative data will also be used to address the remaining research questions about program impact (RQ2: What are the effects of participation in the project on teacher outcomes? RQ3: What are the effects of participation in the project on principal and other school leader outcomes? RQ4: What are the effects of participation in the project on student achievement?). In addition to interview and survey data, the evaluator will obtain longitudinal administrative data from the district and the state. These data will include administrative records (e.g., position vacancies, new hires, and teacher and school leader demographics), retention rates and evaluation ratings for teachers and school leaders, and student outcomes (primarily student achievement).

The evaluation will incorporate regular communication between the evaluator, key project personnel, and the district through quarterly update meetings to review plans, progress, and preliminary data. As detailed in the evaluation plan, the evaluator will provide timely summaries of findings from analyses of program implementation and impact data. For example, program data and artifacts will be discussed during monthly meetings with the project director, and educator effectiveness and student achievement data will be examined and shared with key personnel annually. At the grant's conclusion, the evaluator will assess

the overall accomplishment of goals and conduct a thorough analysis of lessons learned.

Cross County School District and NIET will disseminate reports at the local, state, and national levels through newsletters, research and policy reports, professional conferences, social media, and other public forums throughout the year. At the **local level**, Cross County School District uses communications to build awareness and support with internal and external audiences. For example, social media is used to describe the work being done and its relevance and impact for school leaders and teachers. Social media, the district newsletter, written articles for state and association newsletters, and outreach to local and state media outlets are used to communicate to broader audiences about the strategies that are impacting students (Appendix F7).

At the **state level**, information about project implementation and findings will be shared with community stakeholders in Arkansas through presentations at state and regional conferences, such as the Arkansas School Board Association Annual Conference. Finally, at the **national level**, the project results will be presented at the annual NIET National Conference, professional research conferences (e.g., American Educational Research Association; the National Forum to Advance Rural Education), and shared at meetings with policymakers and legislators. NIET has previously shared its most promising findings in Washington, D.C. during Congressional Hearings, meetings with policymakers and legislators, and other advocates for educator quality, and it will continue to do so to inform policy and impact educational reform. The evaluator will also incorporate findings into the annual performance reports to address progress toward key performance measures.

C. Quality of the Management Plan

Cross County School District will serve as the fiscal agent for the proposed TSL grant. The district has served successfully as the fiscal agent for federal and state grants and will utilize

these experiences and strategies to implement the proposed grant's clearly defined responsibilities and milestones on time and within budget. The district has the capacity and expertise within its team to successfully implement the proposed project (Appendix B).

Table 3. Project Team Key Personnel

Personnel	Qualification & Duties	% FTE
██████████, Principal Investigator	██████████ will serve as principal investigator. He will lead overall grant execution and provide oversight for financial, administrative, and compliance matters.	1%
██████████, Project Director	██████████ will serve as the grant's project director. She will provide direct oversight to the project and monitor program implementation and the quality of training and support.	50%
██████████, District Treasurer	██████████ serves as District Treasurer in Cross County School District and will be responsible for processing payments and monitoring spending on the grant.	3%

The superintendent, ██████████, is an accomplished district leader who has been recognized statewide as a transformative leader who achieves results for educators and students. ██████████ has a strong record of success in managing large projects, and developing financial and management plans to ensure sustainability. He will serve as the principal investigator and devote this time to oversight and escalation for this project. ██████████ is the District Executive Master Teacher/Federal Programs Coordinator and will serve as the Project Director. ██████████ is an expert in the TAP System, having previously served as a principal of a school implementing the TAP System. ██████████ will provide direct oversight to the project and monitor program implementation and the quality of training and support. ██████████ has worked for almost two decades to oversee the financial activities of Cross County School District. ██████████

■■■■ will be responsible for processing payments and monitoring spending on the grant. Together, these three key district personnel will be responsible for ensuring that project tasks are completed on time and all milestones are met within budget.

Table 4 is organized around three key components: 1) the project milestones and tasks, 2) key personnel who will perform these tasks, and 3) timeline for completing them. The milestones described on Table 4 are aligned to the logic model (Appendix A) and project description within Section B, including each of the five project strategies represented as S1-S5. The responsible party column denotes who will lead each milestone or key task, and includes: District Administration (DA), Project Director (PDs), school leaders (SL), teacher leaders (TL), and NIET. Quarter 1 begins in October of each year. Milestones are in bold and the activities to meet those milestones are in plain text

Table 4. Milestone and Key Tasks Summary

Milestones (bold)	Responsible	Quarter			
Key Tasks to meet each milestone (connection to Strategy 1-5)	Party	1	2	3	4
Year 1 - Milestones and Key Tasks					
Complete Project Start-up					
Establish TSL Advisory Board (S5)	PD	✓			
Kickoff meeting with district leadership (S5)	PD, DA, NIET	✓			
Provide data-driven implementation workshops (S1-S4)	PD, DA, NIET	✓			
Establish PBCS Committee (S4, S5)	PD	✓			
Hire communications manager & develop communications plan (S5)	PD		✓		
Establish Project Advisory Committees and Schedules					
TSL Advisory Board meetings (quarterly) (S5)	PD, DA, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
PBCS Committee meetings (quarterly) (S4, S5)	PD, DA,		✓	✓	✓

Establish cluster schedule for 2023-24 (S3)	SL, PD, DA	✓				
Hire Master Teachers						
Establish committee for master teacher selection (S1)	PD, NIET	✓				
Recruit, interview, hire master teachers (S1)	PD, SL, DA	✓				
Deliver Foundational Training						
CORE Training on elements of the HCMS (evaluation, professional learning, goal setting, instructional leadership, differentiated support for new and under certified teachers) (S1-S5)	NIET, DA, SL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
NIET National Conference and Summer Institute (S1-S3)	PD, DA, SL, TL		✓	✓		
Deliver Annual Coaching and Support						
Provide on-site school support and coaching (monthly) (S1-4)	NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provide district support (bimonthly) (S4)	NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collaborative learning group for school leaders (quarterly) (S2)	PD, DA, NIET		✓	✓	✓	
Collaborative learning group for teacher leaders (quarterly) (S2)	PD, SL, NIET		✓	✓	✓	
Begin TAP Implementation for school year 2023-24						
Teacher observations, cluster meetings, ILT meetings (S1-3)	SL, TL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School leader and ILT observations, goal setting (S1-3)	SL, TL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School Reviews (S1-5)	NIET			✓		
Complete Project Monitoring and Evaluation Tasks						
Baseline data collection (observation, survey, interview, student growth) (S4, S5)	PD, Research	✓				
Implementation and quality assurance meetings (monthly) (S1-5)	PD, SS, LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Calculate and Award Performance-based Compensation						
PBCS Committee meetings (quarterly) (S4, S5)	PD, DA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Enter PBC data into data management system (S4)	PD, SL			✓	✓	

Calculate PBC awards for teachers and school leaders (S4)	PD, DA			✓	✓
Award PBC for teachers and school leaders (S4)	DA				✓
Years 2 and 3 – Milestones and Tasks					
Conduct Project Advisory Committees (Hire as needed)					
TSL Advisory Board meetings (quarterly) (S1)	PD, DA, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recruit, interview, hire new teacher leaders (if necessary) (S3)	DA, SL			✓	✓
Continue Delivering Trainings					
Quarterly trainings with master teachers (S2 S3)	PD, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly trainings with school leaders (S1-3)	PD, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly training to provide differentiated support for new and under certified teachers	PD, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
NIET National Conference and Summer Institute (S1-3, S5)	PD, DA, SL, TL			✓	✓
Deliver Annual Coaching and Support					
Provide on-site school support and coaching (monthly) (S1-3, S5)	NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provide district support (bi-monthly) (S5)	NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Master teacher meeting (quarterly) (S2)	PD, NIET		✓	✓	✓
Continue TAP Implementation for school years 2024-25 and 2025-26					
Teacher observations, cluster meetings, ILT meetings (S1-3)	SL, TL	✓	✓	✓	✓
School leader and ILT observations, goal setting (S1-3)	SL, TL	✓	✓	✓	✓
School Reviews (S1-5)	PD, SS			✓	
Calculate and Award Performance-based Compensation					
PBCS Committee meetings (quarterly) (S4, S5)	PD	✓	✓	✓	✓
Enter PBC data into data management system (S1, S4)	PD, SL	✓	✓	✓	✓
Calculate PBC awards for teachers and school leaders (S4)	PD, DA			✓	✓

Award PBC for teachers and school leaders (S4, S5)	DA				✓
Complete Project Monitoring and Evaluation Tasks					
Implementation and quality assurance meetings (monthly) (S1-5)	PD, DA, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data collection (observation, survey, interview, growth) (S1-5)	PD, Research			✓	✓
Analyze data for human capital decisions (S1, S4, S5)	PD, DA, SL		✓	✓	

D. Adequacy of Resources

(i) The likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement

Cross County School District has a clear vision for the systems improvement we will achieve through the TSL grant. We have in place key elements for success including:

- The Superintendent has experience successfully implementing the TAP System
- The School Board and community leaders are committed to this work
- The Federal Programs Coordinator will be the Project Director
- The two school leaders support using the TAP System as a model for continuous improvement, and this school year the district adopted the NIET Principal Standards Rubric
- The district has 2 master teachers and 4 mentor teachers already in place, who are ready to strengthen their role in coaching and supporting classroom teachers

The GREAT project will build on this foundation to create a high-quality HCMS that supports improvement in student outcomes. This project will result in systems change at three levels.

First, the GREAT project will create *change in classroom practice* through: 1) multiple measures of teaching and learning to provide the data to set goals and monitor progress, 2) weekly collaborative learning teams led by trained teacher leaders that provide job-embedded professional learning tied to specific classroom challenges, and 3) individual instructional

coaching to provide teachers with hands-on guidance as they implement student learning strategies and improve their practice. School leadership teams build overall instructional leadership capacity to drive *school-level change*, including using data to set goals, designing professional learning, and ensuring that coaching and feedback are having an impact. District leadership teams create direct communication and collaboration among central office staff working to support *district-level change* and coordinate these changes in the schools they support. This coordination is enhanced as district leaders plan and deliver training for school leaders and use observation and feedback along with school visits to create a consistent and coherent message for principals about priorities and goals.

(ii) Build local capacity that address the needs of the target population

Cross County School District recognizes the importance of building local expertise to effectively implement the TAP System and continuously improve the model, while maintaining support from diverse stakeholders. Through NIET's district-level coaching and support, district practices will be integrated into existing structures and systems to ensure their continuity. This support will strengthen district systems of instructional support for schools by collaboratively identifying high-impact action steps to improve instruction and providing coaching for district leaders aligned to those action steps. In addition, NIET will assist Cross County School District in establishing district-level structures to provide professional learning and coaching for school and teacher leaders. The district leadership team (DLT) provides a critical focal point for strategic support for schools – bringing together central office leaders with different portfolios or areas of focus to work collaboratively to create coherence in these initiatives at the school level.

Support for school leaders includes quarterly collaborative meetings initially led by NIET that will later be facilitated by a member of the DLT and focused on specific areas for

improvement based on school visits and observations. This collaborative work helps to extend strong practices and develop a shared commitment to district goals while building leadership capacity. Through these meetings, principals will develop a more consistent approach to evaluating classroom practice, reinforcing expectations across buildings. Teacher leaders attend similar collaborative quarterly meetings led by NIET and a designated DLT leader. Quarterly master teacher meetings provide opportunities to address shared problems of practice based on teacher and student needs and develop strategies for supporting more effective professional learning teams at the school level. Master teachers will work together to calibrate their understanding of strong instruction, creating consistency across the district. This systematic approach of targeted support builds capacity at all levels, including acting as a strong influencing factor in teachers' decisions to apply to and remain in jobs in Cross County School District.

(iii) Resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant

This TSL project has broad support from stakeholders as evidenced by the letters of support submitted by teachers, school leaders, district leaders, the school board, and project partner NIET (Appendix C). Derek Wood, President of the Cross County School Board, states in his letter, "in working with NIET and the TSL grant, our district will be able to recruit teachers for our rural district. These would be the same teachers that would often take positions in more populated areas that have the ability to pay higher salaries."

Financial Sustainability and Sustainability Planning. Cross County School District's Superintendent has experience in creating long-term funding for this work and has convened senior leaders in the district to create a multi-year financial sustainability and management plan. The district is currently using existing districts funds to support ongoing implementation of the TAP System, and will continue to use these funds moving forward. Funds that are currently

being used, and will continue to be used, include local funding, state National School Acts funding (based on poverty), and Title II(A) funding. In addition, the district will aggressively pursue other streams of funding that support all efforts to improve educator effectiveness.

The long-term sustainability and success plan for this project includes building collective buy-in, creating capacity through training and support, increasing educator skills and driving student growth, and establishing financial sustainability. The project is exceeding the 50% match requirement through in-kind time and effort of Cross County School District's career teachers and school leaders. Additionally, NIET is providing in-kind support valued at \$45,000 per year. The transition of the structure of the school day to support cluster meeting schedules, personnel time and effort, and implementation of the HCMS make up the in-kind contribution, thereby demonstrating district commitment to implementing the system in the long-run. In addition, Cross County School district will continue to review other expenditures to determine if funds can be shifted as the improvements supported by the project show impact.

Communications. Grant partners understand that communication, both internal and external to the school community, is essential to this project's success. To facilitate effective communication, a communications manager will be contracted to support efforts to create ongoing communications to build awareness, understanding, and support for the HCMS, PBCS and educator evaluation systems among teachers, school leaders, other school personnel, and the community (including parents). The communications manager will also support recruitment efforts for a diverse faculty (Competitive Preference Priority 2). Together with the communications manager and NIET's communications department, we will disseminate information through newsletters, websites, and other public forums throughout each grant year.