

Elevating Teacher Effectiveness in a Rural Community

Overview of Key Findings from a Teacher Incentive Fund Grant

The Challenge

Schools in rural communities face many challenges in retaining effective teachers, many of which are beyond school leaders' control: need for educators to serve multiple roles, lower teacher salaries, and large percentages of students from low-income backgrounds. However, cultivating a school culture where teachers are supported to be effective can positively impact teacher retention and improve student outcomes – and that shift is one that school leaders can influence.

Elevating Teacher Effectiveness and Changing School Cultures

The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) has helped hundreds of schools improve student, educator, and school outcomes through the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement, a comprehensive approach to enhancing teacher and school effectiveness. Cross County School District in Cherry Valley, Arkansas, has partnered with NIET through a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant to raise educator excellence and student achievement through enhancing their implementation of the TAP System.

Cross County School District serves a rural population of about 580 students, over 70% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Through the TAP System, Cross County School District has created a sustainable performance-based compensation system and human capital management system that includes evaluation and support for educators. These, in turn, have had positive impacts on school culture, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement. According to Principal Jessica Stacy of Cross County Elementary Technology Academy, “The focus on data-driven instructional decisions molds the culture of our school into one where teachers and their students strive for greatness.”

Outcomes from the first three years of the TIF grant include:

- 98% of surveyed teachers reported high levels of collegiality in their school in 2018-19
- 94% of teachers had ratings of “effective” or higher in 2018-19, a 19-point increase since 2015-16
- 96% of effective teachers were retained in 2019-20, a 21-point increase since 2016-17
- Passing rates on state assessments showed 6-8 point gains for all subjects from 2015-16 to 2018-19, compared with 1-2 point increases in schools with similar demographic characteristics

Better Teaching, Higher Achievement

The TIF grant has helped Cross County School District to effectively address the challenges of providing high-quality instruction in its rural schools through systematic efforts to support and retain effective teachers using the TAP System. The increase in effective teachers has occurred alongside improved achievement for students. Building the capacity of educators ensures that change is lasting across the schools and that it impacts not only the current group of students but those to follow.

