



Algiers Charter
Schools Association

Education...Just Different



TEACHER ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM™



→ *A New Direction for Success*

→ ALGIERS CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION CAMPUSES

ALGIERS TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY

ALICE M. HARTE CHARTER SCHOOL

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER ACADEMY OF GLOBAL STUDIES

EDNA KARR CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

HARRIET R. TUBMAN CHARTER SCHOOL

MARTIN BEHRMAN CHARTER ACADEMY FOR CREATIVE
ARTS AND SCIENCES

McDONOGH #32 LITERACY CHARTER SCHOOL

O. PERRY WALKER COLLEGE AND CAREER PREPARATORY
HIGH SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CENTER

WILLIAM J. FISCHER ACCELERATED ACADEMY

TAP WEAVES A TAPESTRY OF ACHIEVEMENT AT ALGIERS CHARTER SCHOOLS

When Pat Henry's son, Gerald, enrolled in New Orleans' Alice M. Harte Charter School as a second grader in August 2005, just two months before Hurricane Katrina devastated the city, neither of them knew that he soon would begin a new educational adventure, now in its fourth school year. This classroom journey is steadily improving the achievements of students at Alice M. Harte and eight other schools under the Algiers Charter Schools Association, or ACSA.

The venture involves an innovative and comprehensive teacher-development system called the Teacher Advancement Program™, or TAP. The reform-minded ACSA incorporated TAP into its charter when it organized two months after the hurricane struck to assume control over and revitalize schools in the Algiers district of New Orleans on the west bank of the Mississippi River.

Henry has gained a richer understanding of the TAP system as a member of the school's Parent-Teacher Organization. "TAP makes a difference. Achievement scores are increasing and positive things are happening.

My son's teachers really know him. While some challenges remain, we're moving in the right direction."

THE BACKDROP

When education reformer Lowell Milken and the Milken Family Foundation created TAP in 1999, the New Orleans school system ranked among the country's worst. It was plagued by academic failure; one school superintendent after another came and went, with little improvement in achievement among the city's 55,000 students.

In the Algiers section, schools weren't faring any better than other New Orleans schools. Before Hurricane Katrina hit, 83 percent of the students in one of the Algiers schools performed below the basic level in English and three of four scored below the basic level in math. "Student performance was very inconsistent among the schools," says Louisiana Superintendent of Education Paul Pastorek.

■ - *Sheila Talamo, Executive Director, Louisiana Teacher Advancement Program*

"TAP is like a tapestry, and what makes a tapestry beautiful is the way the threads all come together. But if you pull a single thread, you begin to lose the picture."

→ ACSA MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to prepare every school and every teacher to teach every child, so that all will learn.

After the hurricane, New Orleans officials and residents began discussing rebuilding the city's schools. They realized the school system needed radical changes to improve student learning. Indeed, based on their poor performance, the state soon after took charge of the schools. But in Algiers, even before the storm, community leaders and legislators had been discussing converting Algiers campuses into charter schools.

When ACSA was established, five schools signed the charter and another joined the following March. Two others were approved to open during the 2006–2007 school year, and a ninth, Algiers Technology Academy, began operating in the 2008–2009 school year. ACSA today serves about 5,100 students. The schools are open by choice to all students within New Orleans' attendance boundaries without an admissions test.

As for the schools' demographics, poverty levels range from 73 percent to 93 percent. The three high schools serve from 251 students at Algiers Technology Academy to 834 at O. Perry Walker College and Career Preparatory High School and Community Center. Elementary school populations range from 423 at McDonogh #32 Literacy Charter School to 631 at Alice M. Harte Charter School.

THE ACSA MODEL

The ACSA tapped reform-minded educators from its beginning and set two basic principles as its foundation: accountability for teachers, principals, administrators

and students; and innovation. Its mission seeks "to prepare every school and every teacher to teach every child, so that all will learn."

Louisiana was among the first states to adopt TAP. Superintendent Pastorek's predecessor, Cecil Picard, embraced TAP after learning about the system at a Milken National Education Conference. It wasn't just performance pay for teachers that interested him. He was captivated by the professional-development and teacher-accountability features. For Picard, TAP represented a long-term, not a short-term, solution. Soon after, he asked school superintendents around the state if they would be interested in learning about TAP. Several schools in Louisiana began the system in 2003, and TAP has expanded steadily in a number of parishes since that time.

Through Picard and Pastorek, Louisiana ranks in the forefront nationally for encouraging and facilitating TAP in the state's elementary and secondary schools. The state's effort is supported by a TAP office, led by Sheila Talamo, TAP executive director, and it employs master teachers and other resources to help TAP schools.

In the 2008–2009 school year, Talamo and Pastorek began a pre-TAP initiative for schools considering the system. Under it, schools have a year of learning before voting on whether to support it. Fifty-six schools are currently participating in Louisiana TAP, including 28 pre-TAP schools.



In New Orleans during the year before the hurricane struck, Teddy Broussard, then-Louisiana TAP executive director and current senior program specialist nationally, had been making presentations about TAP. Some ACSA leaders were keenly interested in it because it empowered teachers, included a professional-growth component and connected teacher compensation to student performance, among other things.

In a bold move, ACSA incorporated TAP into its charter, making it clear that the comprehensive system would serve as the backbone for improving teacher quality and growth in student achievement. The benefits of including it in the charter are far-reaching. Pre-Katrina, teachers and administrators had dealt with so many different programs that came and went, they initially were leery of any new system like TAP. But with it included in the charter, teachers and administrators recognized it would serve as the engine for school and student improvement on a long-term basis.

For teachers like Pat Richards, a first-grade teacher at Dwight D. Eisenhower Academy of Global Studies, the system reinvigorated their approach to education, with its emphasis on weekly collaboration, teacher evaluations and professional development. A teacher for 35 years, she recalls the seemingly endless cycle of rotating programs and the countless training notebooks that invariably ended up on the shelf. “This isn’t the way it is with TAP,” she says. “We’ve been trained. We’ve been taught. Everyone is learning from the books we get. They are not dusty; they are not sitting on a shelf because we use them all the time.”

Implementing TAP costs each school about \$250,000 a year, with the resources primarily coming from state and federal funds and grants. In particular, a multi-year, \$17.6 million federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant awarded to the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching is helping enhance TAP’s implementation and expansion in Algiers. NIET is a non-profit organization that operates TAP around the country.

→ ABSOLUTE ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS VS. VALUE-ADDED GROWTH

TAP focuses on assessing value-added growth rather than absolute achievement levels. There is a distinct difference.

Academic attainment is the level of achievement a student reaches at a single point in time, such as on an annual standardized test given at the end of the school year. For a school's and/or teacher's performance, academic attainment usually is a specific numerical score or standard of achievement, such as basic, proficient or advanced.

In contrast, academic growth is the academic gain or progress a student makes over a period of time, rather than a snapshot of his/her performance. Value-added analysis, the metric employed by TAP, is a statistical technique that uses student achievement data over time to measure the learning gains that students make. This methodology offers a way to estimate the impact schools and teachers have on student learning isolated from other contributing factors, such as family characteristics and socioeconomic background.

WHAT TAP OFFERS – AND DELIVERS

Research demonstrates that having a high-quality teacher in the classroom ranks as the single most important school factor driving increased student achievement. As TAP Founder Milken notes about this third-party research, “The most effective teachers produce as much as five times the learning gains of the least effective teachers. And four consecutive years of high-quality teachers can close the achievement gap.”

ACSA leaders found TAP's four key elements for success especially attractive. They specifically relate to improving teacher quality. They focus on:

- **Multiple career paths:** TAP lets teachers pursue a variety of positions throughout their careers without having to move into school administration. Besides being career classroom teachers, they can strive to become mentor and master teachers, depending upon their interests, abilities and accomplishments. As teachers move up the ranks, their qualifications, roles and responsibilities increase, and so does their compensation. This allows good teachers to advance professionally without leaving the classroom, and it creates expert teacher leaders to provide support to other teachers. In Algiers, for instance, Margaret



Leaf, a 12-year teaching veteran, taught English language arts at an elementary school and then at Edna Karr Charter High School before becoming a master teacher there under TAP.

“The most effective teachers produce as much as five times the learning gains of the least effective teachers. And four consecutive years of high-quality teachers can close the achievement gap.”

- **Ongoing applied professional growth:** TAP’s strong professional development focuses on identifying and dealing with instructional needs that specific teachers face with specific students. Teachers use data to target these areas of need, and they benefit from cluster groups that meet during the school day for at least 90 minutes weekly or more frequently. These clusters comprise teachers in the same grade or with the same subjects. These detailed discussions center around instructional and student-achievement performance.

The cluster sessions serve as the cornerstone for school improvement, and they are led by master and mentor teachers who also provide teachers with on-going classroom-based coaching support.

- **Instructionally focused accountability:** TAP employs a comprehensive system for evaluating teachers. They are held accountable for meeting research-based standards based on 26 indicators and set into operation against a five-point scale rubric. Each teacher is evaluated four-to-six times a year by trained and certified evaluators who assess the TAP performances standards. This value-added analysis evaluates each TAP teacher based on how much learning growth students achieve during the school year. Teachers also are evaluated collectively based on the learning growth of all students in the school. Thus, TAP makes it possible to consider multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. It also provides ongoing training, mentoring and classroom support to help teachers meet these accountability standards.

- **Performance-based compensation:** Typically, schools pay teachers based on their years of teaching experience and professional-development credits. TAP provides additional compensation to teachers based on new roles and responsibilities, their classroom accomplishments and their students' value-added achievement. The system also encourages school districts to offer additional compensation to those who teach in hard-to-staff subjects and schools. Further, salary increases are given to master and mentor teachers because they assume more responsibilities and authority and work a longer school year than the typical classroom teacher.

TAP schools also employ a professional-development model based on the *Five Steps for Effective Learning* concept. Its basic idea is that teachers learn, too. First, teachers each identify a need. Second, teachers learn researched strategies to address that need. At one TAP school, for instance, the science cluster identified an area of reading comprehension dealing with cause-and-effect relationships as a need. They recognized that it is an important logical skill necessary for students in all science classes.

Third, teachers develop and practice the strategies in their cluster meetings. Fourth, they apply the new learning in the classroom and, fifth, they evaluate its effectiveness and fine-tune the process.

"TAP is a systemic reform process for schools to improve teacher quality and student achievement," says ACSA Chief Academic Officer Kevin Gutterrez. "It's a very rigorous method and it's on the ground day after day. Teachers work at it consistently, and it's embedded in the school day based on student data."

PROOF OF ADVANCEMENT: VALUE-ADDED LEARNING GAINS

TAP employs structured, value-added student achievement data, a metric that looks at the amount a student is expected to grow compared with similar schools across the state. This serves as a measure of student achievement. Using the statistical technique of value-added analysis, a school can measure an individual student's progress in terms of student growth over time as compared to being evaluated against fixed state or federal standards.

Value-added analysis provides a more useful indicator of school and teacher performance than merely looking at student attainment levels that, commonly, are used in public education today. This system also is crucial to TAP's performance-pay component since teachers of all students have the same opportunity for success.

After the ACSA's first year with TAP, it was clear the comprehensive system was making a big difference. ACSA students scored more than 22 percent higher than their neighboring peers in math and reading. Still, under TAP, the ACSA needed three years of value-added student achievement data for individual schools before it could gauge how the schools themselves were doing and also determine performance-based compensation. For six ACSA schools, that period ended last year, and the achievement gains were substantial.

Five of the schools — William J. Fischer, Alice M. Harte, Edna Karr, O.P. Walker and Martin Behrman — each recorded a value-added score of five, the highest score possible and signifying "far above average" results. Indeed, it indicates progress of two standard errors above an expected full year's growth. Eisenhower matched its expected year's growth, receiving a three score. (See chart on opposite page.)

In July 2008, two ACSA schools — Martin Behrman Charter Academy for Creative Arts and Sciences and Dwight D. Eisenhower Academy of Global Studies — were taken off the state’s “failing schools” list because of the progress they had made. But further improvement in student achievement is necessary.

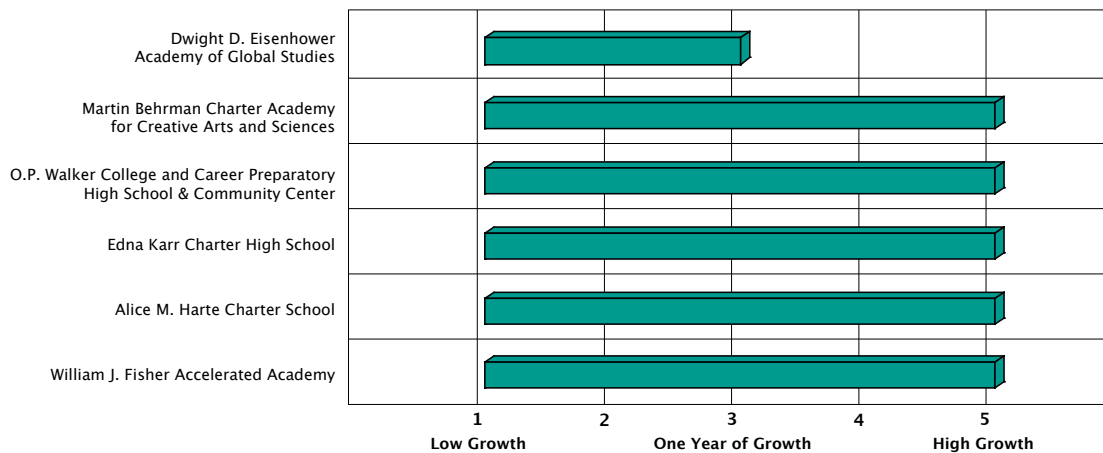
Based on the significant value-added gains, as well as the other necessary criteria, about 200 Algiers teachers received performance awards in February 2009 totaling \$400,000. The average bonus was \$2,000, with some teachers receiving as much as \$2,800. The performance-based awards furnished a “palpable” sign that change had finally come to New Orleans public schools, said State Superintendent Pastorek.

PROOF OF ADVANCEMENT: TEACHER DATA AND VIEWS

By practically every measure, TAP teachers make substantial gains in their own professional growth and achievements. In a 2007 study by NIET on the effectiveness of TAP, TAP teachers outperformed similar non-TAP teachers in producing an average year’s growth or more in their students’ achievement.

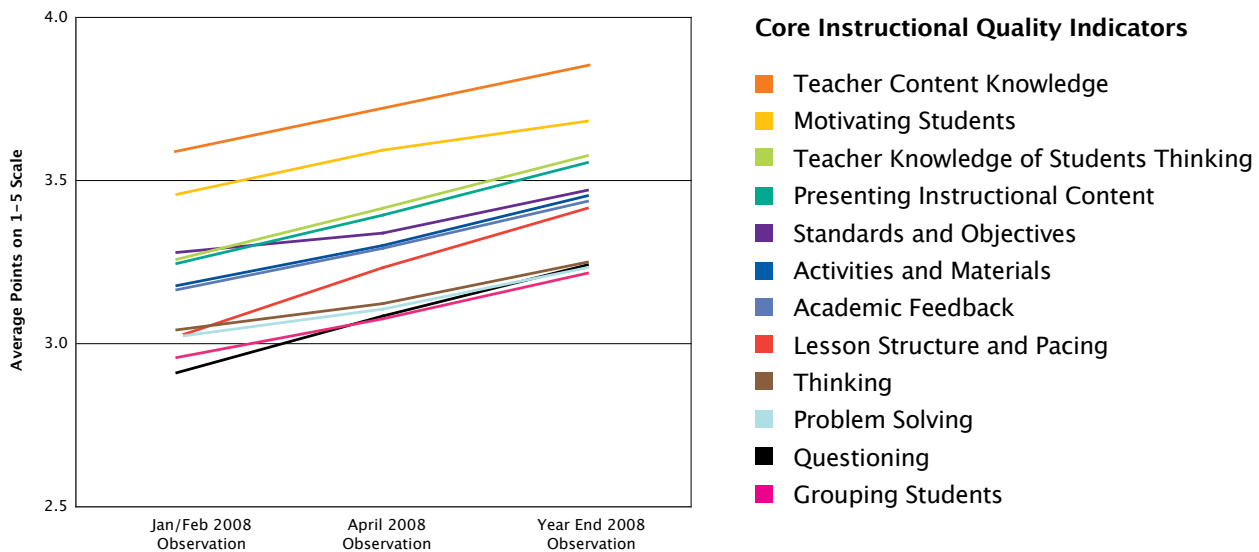
The system also promotes collegiality among teachers, most likely because of TAP’s ongoing applied professional growth and the regular weekly or semi-weekly cluster meetings of teachers. In NIET’s 2008 annual national survey of teacher attitudes, nearly 70 percent of TAP teachers reported high levels of collegiality and more than 90 percent experienced moderate and high levels of collegiality.

VALUE-ADDED SCORES OF ALGIERS (ACSA) CHARTER SCHOOLS 2007-2008



Growth (value-added) is independently calculated by SAS/EVAAS for the State of Louisiana. It is not determined by NIET or TAP staff.

IMPROVEMENT IN OBSERVED TEACHER SKILLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN ALGIERS CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION



Further, TAP helps reduce teacher turnover rates. In ACSA schools, the teacher turnover rate in the 2006–2007 school year was 22 percent, well above the 13 percent national average. In 2007–2008, it dropped to 14 percent and to under 6 percent in the 2008–2009 school year.

In the Algiers charter schools, teacher skills improved across the board. A study at four ACSA elementary schools showed that average teacher skill scores improved on all 12 skills assessed during the 2007–2008 school year. On a 1–5 point scale, notable gains were made in motivating students, presenting instructional content, giving academic feedback, grouping students, problem solving and thinking. (See chart above.)

ACSA teachers emphasize the professional advances they see themselves and colleagues making in the classroom. At Dwight D. Eisenhower Academy of Global Studies, Pat Richards, a 35-year educator, credits TAP for reinvigorating teachers’ approach to education,

with its emphasis on weekly collaboration, professional development and teacher evaluation.

At Martin Behrman Charter Academy for Creative Arts and Sciences, master teacher Deidra Bradley says she has benefited the most from collaborating with other teachers. “The beauty of TAP is that we all sit down and analyze the student data and talk about teaching practices. We’re not teaching in isolation,” she notes. As for being a TAP master teacher, Bradley says, “I can now see our school from a full lens, not just from my classroom.”

Bradley also cites the growth in teaching skills of a new teacher during the school year. During the first half of the year, he absorbed a lot and was open to classroom teaching suggestions and strategies, but in cluster meetings he didn’t discuss issues he was experiencing with individual students. “But in March,” says Bradley, “he suddenly found his voice, and he contributes a lot of information and data about his students.”



→ BASIC TAP GLOSSARY

Career Teacher: A regular classroom teacher.

Cluster Group: The basic unit for teacher professional growth. A cluster group focuses on instructional improvement for increasing student achievement.

Field Testing: Precise, detailed analysis of learning strategies tried in the classroom.

Individual Growth Plan: A plan that TAP teachers develop with master/mentor teacher to lead to higher student achievement.

Leadership Team: Includes master and mentor teachers in a TAP school and is led by a principal.

Master Teacher: Occupies top-ranked teaching position in a TAP school.

Mentor Teacher: Provides day-to-day coaching and mentoring services to career teachers under his/her supervision.

Professional Growth Block: Pupil-free time in the school day when cluster groups meet for professional growth activities.

Rubric: Set of instructional rules of conduct or procedure that applies to TAP. It consists of three major divisions: instruction, designing/planning instruction and the learning environment.

Value-Added: A statistical model for gauging how much students gain or improve in academic achievement in a given year from pre- to post-testing.



At Alice M. Harte Charter School, Principal Anna Faye Marciante also sees new teachers developing much faster into effective teachers under TAP. Through coaching about how to analyze student work, a new fifth grade teacher has become adept this school year at looking at his students' work; determining who's a "high," "medium" or "low" achiever, and explaining why; then articulating how a student could move to a higher category by simply taking this step or that one. "Education schools don't teach that level of analysis and dialogue," she maintains.

With TAP, teachers can try new classroom strategies, test them, and quickly make modifications when necessary. They don't wait until a new school year begins to institute a change. For instance, Martin Behrman Charter Academy found that its students were having challenges with reasoning and problem solving, so the school adopted a so-called "question, answer and response strategy" for its students. Mentor teachers field-tested the strategy in their classrooms, and it was found that it needed to be modified.

Specifically, teachers found that their "low" students were progressing "by leaps and bounds" by using the strategy, says Bradley. But high-achieving students weren't progressing as well. Teachers talked in their cluster groups about what was working and what wasn't. They modified the strategy for medium- and high-achievers and, through field-testing, they found the changes worked.

PROOF OF ADVANCEMENT: INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

Stories abound within the ACSA schools about how individual students have blossomed since TAP was introduced. Some of those stories come from students themselves.

Jahquille Ross, a junior at Edna Karr Charter High School, says various instructional strategies he's learned in recent years will help him in the future — in college and beyond. He credits TAP. Specifically, the 17-year-old cites different techniques he's learned this year in his Advanced Placement English class for editing and proofing his work, including reading a paper backwards to catch grammatical errors.

Another strategy in sophomore English helped Ross grasp literary terms and words that he didn't understand, but couldn't look up through the use of context clues, such as keywords and contrast/antonym clues. "I've become more engaged in reading and mastering the meaning of words without a dictionary," he says.

He also cites a strategy with the acronym UAE, which stands for understanding, analyzing and evidence. "It forces us when answering a question about a passage we've read to break down what it's saying, find the evidence, and then develop a convincing answer," he says.

Elementary school teachers and principals in the Algiers schools provide numerous examples of students who have made great academic strides. Principal Marciante at Alice M. Harte says individual students' names will pop up at faculty cluster meetings and, over time, it becomes apparent how they are progressing. "A light bulb suddenly goes off in little Jane's head and suddenly her reading scores are improving substantially," she says.

Faydra Alexander, TAP coordinator for ACSA, says the improvements among students are evident especially among those who have been in TAP schools from the beginning. "When we track fourth graders this year, and they've been with us since first grade, we definitely see a difference. They're closing the achievement gap," she says.

CONCLUSION

In ACSA schools, TAP becomes more deeply embedded in the culture each year as system refinements and increased support from teachers, administrators, students and parents help spark further academic gains.

In addition, the \$17.6 million federal TIF grant awarded to NIET is helping enhance TAP's implementation and expansion in Algiers by augmenting the development of a principal compensation and evaluation system, data systems for tracking recruitment and retention of teachers and principals, an online system for tracking evaluations and a library of training DVDs.

Parents also see a difference. "They know students are making progress in school," says Ross, the Edna Karr Charter High School junior. For one thing, a number of stories in *The Times-Picayune* of New Orleans and on radio and television have spotlighted student achievement gains and performance pay at the ACSA campuses.

The ACSA will be providing parents with a clearer idea of how the comprehensive system specifically helps teachers and schools improve student achievement. "We're eager to show them how TAP helps make their children's schools better," says Alexander.

For his part, ACSA Board President Charles Rice, a prominent New Orleans civic leader, contends, "TAP is definitely one of the key factors for the success of the Algiers charter schools. With TAP, they've shown great improvement, and they can register even greater improvement ahead."

If any uncertainty surrounds TAP, it likely reflects continued funding for the system. But based on the commitment to education reform from President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, ACSA officials are optimistic about ongoing financial support for TAP.

In addition, ACSA and civic leaders are looking to recruit private partners to augment government funding to ensure that reform programs like TAP continue, so the improvement in student achievement continues.

Further, Superintendent Pastorek has major growth plans on the agenda. "We're looking to expand TAP dramatically throughout the state," he says, describing the system as "a frontline offering that delivers dramatically impactful professional development for teachers."

"When we track fourth graders this year, and they've been with us since first grade, we definitely see a difference. They're closing the achievement gap."

In the Algiers section, all anyone needs to do to understand the difference TAP is making is to talk to those involved with it day to day. That includes ACSA administrators, principals, master and mentor teachers, classroom teachers and students.

Rene Lewis-Carter, the principal of Martin Behrman Charter Academy for Creative Arts and Sciences and a 17-year educator, may best sum up the difference TAP makes: "Never before have teachers been able to gain job-embedded professional development, create their own research and data at school and be recognized for value-added growth with additional compensation. TAP causes us to reflect, look at our practices and make changes. We are honing excellent teachers — and every child deserves to receive an excellent education from excellent teachers."

At the ACSA schools, TAP is helping weave a rich and vivid tapestry of student — and teacher — achievement.



