Supporting New Texas Teachers to Be Effective — and Stay in the Classroom

This past year marked another growth milestone with NIET's Texas partnerships. Among other new work with the state, NIET was approved as one of two potential partners for the Texas Education Agency's Mentor Program Allotment (MPA), through which districts can receive funding to develop or strengthen a mentorship program that pairs new teachers with mentors who have a demonstrated record of success. NIET was chosen by most districts that applied for MPA funding, and now NIET is working with 16 districts this fall to develop or strengthen mentor programs across Texas.

As of mid-October, nearly 400 district leaders, school administrators, and teachers have gone through the initial NIET mentor training. Consistent with NIET's holistic approach, district and school administrators are participating in the training alongside mentor teachers to ensure a common language is adopted within districts and to develop a systemwide culture that will sustain the mentor program beyond the TEA allocation. With each district having adopted different COVID protocols for fall 2020, training has been delivered through both high-quality virtual live-streamed training as well as face-to-face workshops.

MPA districts are focused this fall on first designing structures for mentorship programs. This looks like transforming traditional mentoring programs into instructionally focused, capacity-building systems that provide mentors with ongoing support as they, in turn, support novice teachers. NIET's work starts with the development of a clear understanding of what it means to be a mentor, defining the characteristics of high-quality mentoring, and utilizing adult learning theory to build trust and support for beginning teachers. Mentors are also trained to understand critical concepts such as the core elements of data-driven instructional coaching and how to apply those in practice.

All of this work is aligned to Texas standards and the use of the T-TESS as an instructional tool — supporting TEA's
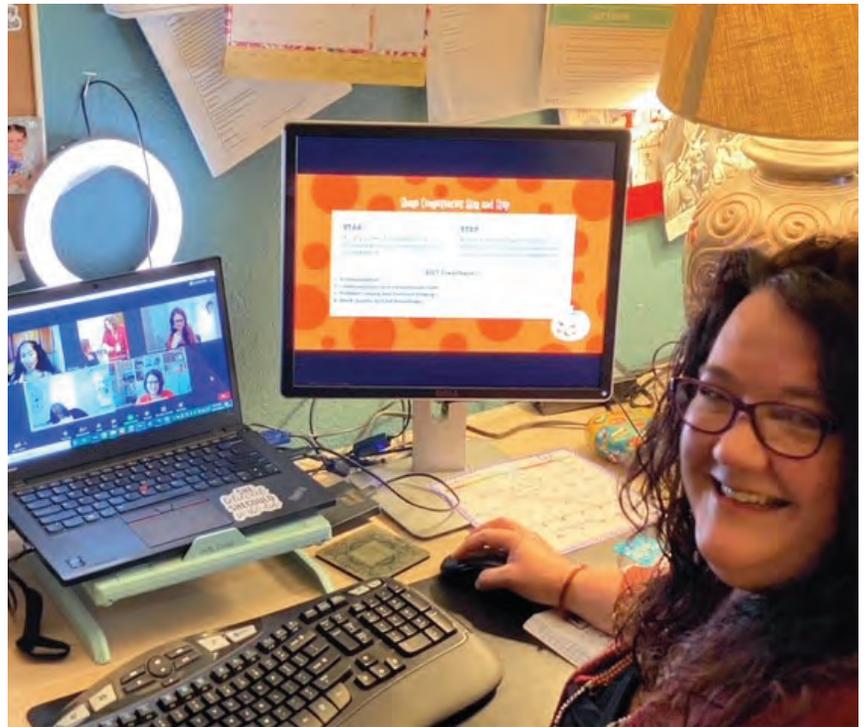
The Texas team — gathered here on a Zoom team meeting — doubled in size this year, led by Texas Director Jodi Leckbee Chan.

broader initiatives. The MPA is designed to help new teachers rapidly improve their classroom practice, leading to student success and greater job satisfaction and retention. Long-term, mentor-based ongoing support for new teachers will not only make it more likely that first-year teachers are successful and stay in the profession, but it also creates teacher leadership opportunities, which research has shown to be effective at improving student outcomes and improving retention rates. At the end of the day, these skills will benefit new and mentor teachers directly as well as build the capacity of instructional leaders across the school to improve teaching and learning.

NIET's partnership with TEA exemplifies how a state agency can be a leader in supporting key levers that promote educator effectiveness and retention — and it serves as a model for how leaders can create and sustain impactful systems in districts and schools.

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