



# Higher Ed Partnerships

## PROVIDE Keys TO THE Classroom

*NIET SUPPORTS OVER 50 INSTITUTIONS  
OF HIGHER ED ACROSS THE U.S.*

**BRIGHT-EYED COLLEGE STUDENTS** at Marian's Klipsch Educators College sit in Assistant Professor Dr. Jennifer Regelski's classroom taking a final exam. But it's not what you might expect from a typical exam. The students are watching a 30-minute teaching session and their task is to provide critical feedback based on the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) rubric's 19 key indicators for effective instruction. They're playing the role of a principal or assistant principal coming into a classroom to give a teacher evaluation. Educators from local schools sit in the back to observe

and one young woman asks Regelski, "Are these your junior-year students?" She's blown away to hear that they are freshman, already learning to evaluate effective teaching practices at this level and depth.

The Klipsch Educators College is two years into its partnership with NIET. Klipsch is just one of the more than 50 higher education institutions that have partnered with NIET in a diversity of ways over the past decade to advance the mission of improving educator effectiveness.

**The elements of NIET's work in higher education have been crystalized into six components,** as explained by NIET Co-President and Chief Learning Officer Dr. Joshua Barnett. Universities can engage NIET in all six avenues, or any from the group. Most partnerships involve 1 (Observation Tools) and 6 (Wraparound Services and Web-based Tools).

## 1 OBSERVATIONAL TOOLS STANDARDS RUBRIC

NIET licenses the Teaching Standards Rubric for Student Teachers to institutions and provides support for clinical supervisors to use the rubric to evaluate teacher candidates during their student teaching phase.

## 2 ADVANCED TRAINING FOR CLINICAL SUPERVISORS & FACULTY

Going beyond the three-day introductory evaluation training, NIET trains clinical supervisors and faculty on post-conferencing, connecting student work to observation and taking a deeper dive into the 19 key indicators.

## 3 INTERNAL ALIGNMENT

Institutions weave the rubric's language and indicators throughout the teacher candidates' courses of study. By the time they are ready for their student-teaching phase, they will have exposure to and be able to incorporate the language from the rubric in their communication.

## 4 EXTERNAL ALIGNMENT

NIET trains the instructors with whom teacher candidates are placed for residencies on the terms and indicators of effective instruction. They are commonly referred to as cooperating, mentor or placement teachers depending on the university. This educator's role is to evaluate the student teachers on the rubric that they've already become comfortable and familiar with through their coursework and coaching from clinical supervisors.

## 5 KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

NIET provides formal overview training to the teacher candidates so they can see the rubric's three domains (Instructional, Planning, and Environment), how the 19 indicators fit within them and which descriptors demonstrate the indicators, in totality. As the students matriculate through their program, they're powered up by being able to recognize the indicators weaved throughout.

## 6 WRAPAROUND SERVICES AND WEB-BASED TOOLS

NIET allows teacher candidates, cooperating teachers and faculty members to complete self-paced modules and to see elements of effective instruction linked to the indicators and the rubric. If a teacher candidate's area of refinement (or need) is student grouping, for example, they can click into a classroom and watch a teacher on that indicator, then, in the same tool, read how that lesson was scored on the rubric.

Administrators use NIET's data management tool to look at how all the teacher candidates are scoring on the different indicators at a glance in a dashboard format. This allows institutions to make informed decisions about where to develop, close gaps and provide additional professional learning.

According to Barnett, taken in full, the six components provide a layered support system for teacher candidates. They are introduced to the terms and indicators linked to effective instruction from an early stage, have them weaved throughout their coursework, and hear consistent communication all the way through from faculty, clinical supervisors and then cooperating teachers. And then they often get jobs right out of school in districts that use NIET's rubric so they are ready to hit the ground running from day one. Barnett calls this a "power-up effect," wherein "we have a consistent pipeline in which multiple vantage points are using the same rubric indicators and communication," he says. "This is the power of an aligned process."

Longstanding partners such as Arizona State University and Texas Tech University — whose faculties each year prepare 5,000 and 1,000 teachers respectively — have used the six components holistically, taking ownership of the system. Texas Tech has developed out new programs in extension for principal and administrator development.

The Klipsch Educators College uses the six components holistically as well and the partnership yielded immediate fruit. The transition was not difficult, as local districts use NIET's evaluation tools, so they were the first at the doorstep of Dean of Klipsch Dr. Kenith C. Britt asking for teacher candidates to complete a yearlong residency in their schools. According to Britt, "Beech Grove, Perry and Decatur lined up and said, 'You're working with NIET; we want to work with you.'" Klipsch currently partners with ten districts in all, representing nearly 60,000 students, with conversations with others underway.

Klipsch threads clinical experiences from freshman year all the way through the end of the teachers' residencies with these specific partners rather than having students scatter out. Britt says it makes for "more intentional impact with a smaller group of schools."

In designing the teacher prep program, faculty members looked at a study from the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE) called "No Time to Lose," based on practices in countries around the world where educational outcomes are high-

flying. They started designing a curriculum based on key practices they wanted to incorporate and found that the NIET rubric was most comprehensive in addressing them. "It really matched up well with the evidence-based practices that we wanted to use. From there, we worked on building rubric language in all our courses," said Regelski. "Both practice and theory are based on the rubric, and we based our vision of our curriculum prior to having the instrument. Then we found that it was the most consistent with what we were looking to do."

Regelski added that Klipsch's district partners "have commented that the students really know the indicators we're addressing and they're surprised by the level that our students can speak to the descriptors and the evidence they're collecting for those descriptors."

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**Dr. Kenith C. Britt**

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AT MARIAN UNIVERSITY

For institutions or states that want to incorporate NIET's tenets into their pre-existing standards or system, NIET provides individualized or customized support, too. NIET has partnered with the South Carolina Department of Education on providing training to all 32 institutions of higher education on the South Carolina Teaching Standards 4.0. — a modification of the NIET rubric to a 4-point scale.

With partners like Northern Arizona University and Middle Tennessee State University, NIET goes deeper with the individualized support, helping them create their own modules to use with their educators, paired with follow-up training, rubric development and continued support.

Southeastern Louisiana University started using some of NIET's rubric indicators with an NIET partnership



*Southeastern Louisiana University*

through US PREP, in what they called the “big six.” US PREP pulled six of the indicators from NIET’s rubric on which to assess student teachers.

After the Dean of Southeastern’s College of Education Dr. Paula Calderon came on board in 2017 and spoke with the faculty, mentor teachers and site coordinators, she found that they were already familiar with the full NIET rubric. Assessing its benefits, they decided to go full force with it. Calderon called the “big six” “a good introduction to the NIET system.”

Now, teacher candidates at Southeastern are exposed to all of the rubric’s indicators and domains, embedded through their coursework from the outset. Calderon said it helps them gain confidence and understand what’s expected of them as teachers. And while she explains that many new teachers fear principal walk-throughs or evaluations, Southeastern’s teacher candidates are

comfortable with assessment. This is because they have been evaluated in their junior year and then informally and formally through their yearlong residency.

“Our teacher candidates are so used to that and know exactly what needs to be done and what kind of feedback needs to be given,” said Calderon. “They know how to get the students to answer their own questions rather than be given the answer. They just do it as second nature.”

Calderon also spoke to how much of an advantage it is for the teacher candidates to understand how to tweak their instruction on the fly, rather than having to wait for something summative or for test scores in June when it’s too late to reach the students.

Cherissa Vitter, assistant professor and IB (International Baccalaureate) coordinator at Southeastern, said that not only does the rubric help the teacher candidates,

but it also strengthens their partner K-12 school districts. Mentor teachers who take yearlong residents from Southeastern gain a more holistic view of the observation and evaluation processes. “They take ownership of the process and get to see the 360-degree leadership aspect,” she says. “It helps them self-improve because now they

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**Dr. Paula Calderon**

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are getting to look at the rubric through the eyes of an administrator in evaluating these teacher candidates and, in turn, themselves.”

When Calderon was being trained as a student teacher, she says the main evaluation tool was a checklist that included questions such as, “Are they making eye contact with every student?” or “Did they smile enough?” Vitter says that what drew Southeastern to NIET’s approach is that it truly is a comprehensive system based on tangible evidence and full feedback loops — “not just a ticksheet of numbers and ratings.”

The teachers are fully classroom-ready by the time they get a job and get the keys to a classroom. Calderon said she hears from principals that most first-year teachers will say, “Thanks for the keys. Now what do I do?” But principals have commented that they don’t need to worry about Southeastern’s teachers and to Calderon, that is the greatest compliment. ■

## The Student Track

*EQUIPPED WITH NIET TRAINING, A SOUTHEASTERN GRAD IS READY TO MAKE HER MARK ON THE CLASSROOM.*

*Payton Bryant graduated from Southeastern Louisiana University in May 2018 and is now teaching at Luling Elementary in St. Charles Parish, where she performed her residency. In January 2019 she joined Education Dean Dr. Paula Calderon to meet with U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos in Washington, D.C., about how our nation can better prepare teaching candidates for the classroom. In her own words, Bryant describes the impact of her training.*

**NIET: Can you tell us a little bit about your visit with Secretary DeVos? What did you talk about and what was that experience like for you?**

**PB:** I was beyond excited for a chance to tell my story of what high-quality teacher preparation can do. My ultimate goal was to convey the importance of making my experience commonplace for new teachers in order to prepare them adequately and retain them for years to come. In so doing, I discussed how pre-service teachers need a chance to fail with a mentor teacher there to guide them because we do not have this chance when we begin in our own classroom. I was so fortunate to have a mentor teacher who held me to the highest of standards, gave me feedback each day, and never settled for anything less than my best.

***NIET: What are your impressions of the NIET rubric and indicators? How has this training helped you improve your readiness for the expectations of the classroom?***

**PB:** I love the NIET rubric for its thoroughness and structure. It covers the essential components needed in every classroom and teacher in order to foster success and conceptual development in students. At Southeastern, I started with the “big six” indicators and worked my way out as I showed effectiveness in each category. Each time I was scored, I was given an area of strength and an area of refinement, which allowed me to develop a reflective growth mindset. I craved feedback from multiple sources. I wanted to be better than I was the day before, and the NIET rubric allowed me to grow by documenting exactly what I was doing. It requires observers to be objective and cite evidence of what I did and what I said. It also prepared me to be evaluated using the COMPASS rubric [Louisiana’s educator support and evaluation system], which is what my parish uses. I am well-prepared for the challenges and workload now that I am on my own.

***NIET: What inspired you to want to be a teacher?***

**PB:** Teachers are always asked, “What inspired you to want to be a teacher?” I’ve never met a teacher who did not answer the question with a story about who inspired them as a student. I was fortunate enough to have some amazing teachers throughout K-12 and higher education. The most inspiring was my second-grade teacher. It was not just because she knew everything or taught me this magnificent content, but also because she loved me. She loved each student in that class. She took time to fix our ponytails and made us tuck in our shirts. She taught

us to work as a team and how to take care of one another. Ms. Whitman showed kindness and love. She made me love school and learning, which helped me become a lifelong learner committed to continuous improvement. I wanted to learn more so that I could teach and become better. She instilled in me very early on that teaching is built on a relationship of respect and trust, both of which she gave and earned.

***NIET: Anything else you want to tell us about the teacher prep program?***

**PB:** Residency is what every high-quality teacher preparation program needs. We cannot retain teachers without giving them the tools necessary to be successful in the classroom. How can we ask them to give their everything each day without giving them the best training? In short, we cannot. We will lose teachers, or worse, not even recruit them if we do not properly prepare them for their roles. Fewer people are turning to this profession, which ultimately hurts our children and communities. We need to incentivize people to choose the teaching profession, and guarantee that they will be prepared for the classroom.



*U.S. Department of Education*