

NIET IN FOCUS



Working FROM Within

NIET'S APPROACH TO
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

PAGE

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*Delivering
High-Quality
Curricula*

*The NIET
Difference*



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A LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dr. Candice McQueen

Partners:

Thank you for the tremendous welcome you have shown me as I have started with NIET! It is a privilege to join the talented NIET team and to work with state and district leaders, higher education faculty, and teachers and principals across the country. The collective mission you and I share — to improve the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders so they will in turn support and accelerate growth of every student — has been my life's work. It motivates me every day and truly is the tie that binds all of us together.

I know effective teaching is the absolute best way to drive student success, so there is no other organization I would rather be leading than one where this belief is matched with exceptional outcomes.

I grew up in Tennessee, and I started my career in education in the same way many of you did: as a classroom teacher. Throughout my career — first as a teacher in elementary and middle schools in both Tennessee and Texas, then as senior vice president and dean of the College of Education at Lipscomb University in Nashville, and most recently as commissioner of education for the Tennessee Department of Education — every success I have seen has come back to great teaching. During my time as dean, Lipscomb was recognized annually as the state’s top-performing educator preparation program based on our first-year teachers’ student growth and achievement results — results that were accelerated as we integrated the state’s teacher evaluation model, which was rooted in rubrics from NIET. At the department, I witnessed the dramatic difference that the TAP System has brought to schools across the state — schools that now experience our top level of growth every year and which have earned Tennessee a spot as one of the fastest improving states in the country.

Educator excellence that supports student success is and always will be at the heart of what we do at NIET. Each of our suite of services — the TAP System, educator effectiveness best practices, teacher leadership opportunities, school improvement solutions, and partnering with higher education — is structured around our core belief that every child deserves an effective educator, in every classroom, every day. And what we do is working. We have seen our TAP System lead to dramatically improved outcomes for students and change the trajectory of entire schools. Those of you who have worked with us have seen firsthand the kind of impact that high-quality products, feedback, coaching, and support can bring to teacher development and student growth.

YOUR SUCCESS IS THE REASON WE ARE EXCITED TO THINK BIGGER.

This spring, we will be celebrating what our educator partners have accomplished, re-centering on what we do each day, and planning for how we can build off what works. We are thinking about how we can



tailor our support based on individual school needs and meet you where you’re at. We are looking for new partners and places where we can come alongside what is happening to take it to the next level. My dream is for every teacher to be fully equipped to meet their students’ needs, to use data and student work to drive next steps, and to work alongside peers who help them to go even further. That is no easy goal, but it’s the right one for our kids.

Over the past few weeks, many of you have welcomed me into your classrooms and clusters to see the work you are leading, hear the questions you are asking, and witness how you are making decisions about addressing students’ needs. I look forward to continuing to be in the field and hearing from you about your ideas on how NIET can continue to improve how it serves our educators. I believe we have an incredible opportunity as an organization to deepen our partnerships and support even more educators in their practice, build institutional capacity, and strengthen teacher leadership opportunities. And I want your ideas about how we can do that well.

I am committed to serving you each day with energy, enthusiasm, and excellence. Please reach out to me if you ever need anything. My email address is cmqueen@niet.org.

*Best,
Candice*



Working FROM Within

NIET'S APPROACH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, at its core, is about improving instruction. Yet, the context and culture of each school requires a unique approach to improving instruction that is specific to its needs and has buy-in from its teaching staff. As NIET continues to evolve, it has expanded its spectrum of supports for schools that are in need of rapid improvement or profound transformation. While some districts, such as Premont Independent School District (Premont ISD) in Texas, have chosen to adopt a holistic system of professional learning led by teacher leaders, other schools have asked NIET to start where they are and work within their existing professional learning structures and strategies.

In fall 2018, NIET began piloting another approach to school improvement in Knox County, Tennessee, and the Orangeburg Consolidated School District 5 in South Carolina. There, NIET staff has worked with the current

instructional leaders, rather than implementing new roles and structures, to change school culture and raise the level of instruction across classrooms. While this new approach may be initially different from the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement, our staff has found the coaching they are providing has planted the seeds from which strong systems of professional learning can grow. No matter the approach, NIET supports four key elements that lead to school success: Instructional excellence, reflective culture, collaborative learning, and collective leadership.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT UNDER TAP

Introduced in 1999, the TAP System has built a track record of success as a comprehensive and intensive approach to strengthening teaching and raising student achievement in underperforming schools. After Premont

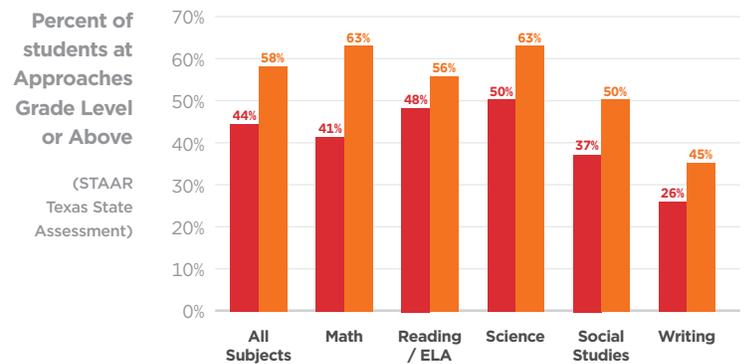
ISD had been on the shutdown list for a number of years, its leaders chose NIET in 2014 to help them implement a new system of professional learning with the hopes of profoundly changing their trajectory. As part of their improvement plan, both schools in the district adopted teacher leader roles, agreed to significant upfront training and coordinated weekly professional learning meetings. NIET trained teacher leaders, or “demonstration teachers,” and worked with them as the key lever for building school culture and strong instruction. Premont teachers have their professional learning led by teacher leaders who test concepts and strategies in classrooms before taking the strategy to teachers. This structure for teacher learning increases buy-in and builds a culture of collaboration.

When conducting walk-throughs and observations, demonstration teachers facilitate discussion around student learning, rather than focusing on instructional deficits. This communicated to teachers that walk-throughs were meant to be supportive rather than correctional. In Premont, principals were given support in facilitating the demonstration teachers' learning, setting goals and monitoring progress. As the structures took hold and were embraced by teachers, Premont began to make impressive strides in student achievement. By 2016, Premont ISD had reached “met standard” status and has continued to steadily improve in the years since. In the round of school letter grades for 2017-2018, Premont received a “B” letter grade for overall performance and an “A” grade for school progress.

NIET'S NEW APPROACH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

While supporting teacher leaders who guide a structured system for professional learning has been NIET's traditional approach to building effective instruction, this is only effective to the extent that a school has built a collaborative school culture to foster a robust system of professional learning. However, this is not always the case in schools identified for improvement, which often lack the time, teacher buy-in and capacity to institute broad new initiatives. For one, schools selected for improvement often face short and urgent timelines to move the needle on school improvement. According to NIET Director of Training Dr. Ann Shaw, “When the stakes

Premont ISD Students Test Scores Improve Across Subjects Between 2013 and 2018



are high, supporting the classroom teacher through professional development and support become urgent. We take a focused approach to have the greatest impact at the classroom level.”

Schools on an improvement list can also show general skepticism or resistance to new initiatives and strategies. Most schools identified for improvement have been under pressure to improve for years and often have tried a plethora of strategies without seeing much success. This produces so-called “reform fatigue,” which can limit the success of big initiatives and new structures. As NIET Trainer Natalie Szakacs explains, “If there is not a culture of collaboration, I can't change the trajectory of that school's performance.” Finally, perhaps the biggest challenge principals and instructional leaders face in chronically underperforming schools is that they have more challenges than time and resources to overcome them. Adding new initiatives to their already full plates can often be counterproductive and even lead to declines in school performance.

When these factors are at play, instead of offering significant modifications to a school's existing structures and strategies, NIET has found greater success by working within a school to empower its leaders through hands-on, job-embedded coaching and support. By supporting existing leadership, NIET helps instructional leaders find coherence in their current initiatives and builds their capacity to lead their own success. Simply stated, Szakacs assures her principals and coaches that “I am coaching so you won't need me.” In the early stages of support, NIET helps schools build excellent instruction and a reflective culture that paves the way for collaborative learning and collective leadership.

School Improvement in Action

In fall 2018, NIET began working with principals and instructional leaders in six schools in Knox County, Tennessee, and Mellichamp Elementary in the Orangeburg 5 District in South Carolina. All schools needed to see rapid improvement that built on their ongoing investments in professional learning. NIET staff partnered with each school to help leaders diagnose barriers teachers faced to delivering effective instruction and used coaching conversations and schoolwide instructional strategies to create a strong school culture around a common language and goals.

LEARNING WALKS TO UNDERSTAND EXCELLENT INSTRUCTION

NIET staff began by taking the school's instructional leaders on learning walks to train them on how to analyze the quality and depth of instruction. NIET grounds learning walks and follow-up in reflective questions that guide the principal's focus towards student engagement and academic growth to determine instructional impact. For example, principals are asked questions such as:

- Was the teacher or the students doing more of the thinking and problem-solving in the classroom?
- How did students respond to the teacher's instructional strategies?
- What kind of student work was produced during the lesson?
- Did the lesson align to the rigor and depth of the lesson's objective?

Observing and diagnosing areas for instructional improvement are only the first part of the process. Once they understand how to observe effective instruction, most principals and instructional leaders already have a large toolkit of strategies they can give to teachers. However, it's critical that instructional leaders understand how to individualize coaching for each teacher. This is done by framing instructional strategies around what approaches best motivate that teacher while also addressing his or her beliefs in student potential. It's through these coaching interactions that instructional

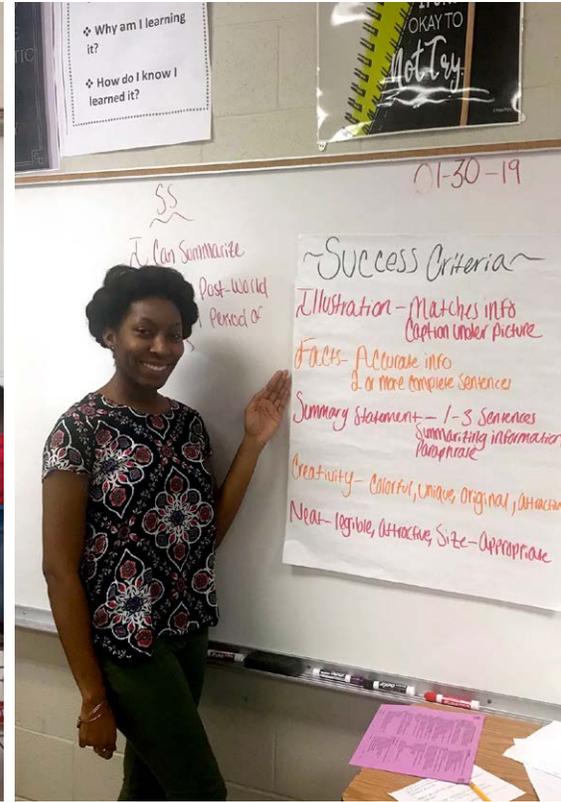
leaders reshape school culture, which leads to a sense of collective efficacy across the school building, then to significant learning gains.

COACHING TO BUILD REFLECTIVE CULTURE

Changing school culture is often the most difficult part of school improvement. In chronically underperforming schools, many of the teachers have been working hard for years, some to the point of exhaustion. Yet given the considerable academic, personal and physical needs of their students, they haven't seen the needle move much. All this effort with little to show for it is disheartening to teachers and can unintentionally create a culture of low collective efficacy. Shaw has seen this problem firsthand. "Sometimes without realizing it we often rob our students from doing the thinking and problem-solving in the lesson because we may think the material is too difficult. Doing so takes away the opportunity for students to engage in material at their level."

In working with the whole staff and individual teachers, the principal must use coaching conversations to overcome any low expectations that teachers are holding for students. To facilitate this, NIET helps school leaders to connect coaching conversations on instructional strategies to one of John Hattie and Klaus Zierer's "10 Mindframes for Visible Learning." For example, if a principal sees or hears a teacher holding low expectations for students, he or she may ask the teacher to reflect on the extent to which "I give and help students understand feedback and I interpret and act on feedback given to me." If the teacher isn't asking for or receiving feedback, it may be because the teacher doesn't think students are capable of meaningfully engaging in their own learning. By asking the teacher to engage in this mindframe and seek student feedback in the lessons, the teacher will see students respond in a positive way. This, in turn, rebuilds the teacher's belief that the students can learn.

To further increase their effectiveness in coaching, instructional leaders need to understand the varying instructional motivations of the teachers in their



building. When coaching on a particular instructional strategy, teachers respond best when the strategy is framed in a way that resonates with their motivations for teaching. While there are many ways to motivate teachers, they will usually want to know at least one of the following when discussing instructional strategy:

- How the strategy will help them improve scores— either their own effectiveness on the rubric or student achievement.** Teachers with this motivation are most likely to respond to strategies that are rooted in success criteria or an instructional rubric, which serves as a guide for them to understand how to score well.
 - If what they are doing is “right” or “wrong” according to the research.** Teachers with this motivation need to know if the strategy they are being asked to carry out is validated and justified by research.
 - How and when they should apply a certain strategy.** Teachers with this motivation may need a model of the approach to see it in action so they can best understand how to apply it themselves.
- How the strategy benefits all students.** Teachers with this motivation need to hear what kind of student learning and outcomes the strategy should produce.

Understanding the instructional motivations and needs of teachers is especially important for communicating and supporting schoolwide learning strategies. The teachers that fall into each of these categories make up their own subculture in the building. Ultimately, the overall culture of a building is the sum of these subcultures and it's the task of the instructional leaders to bring these subcultures into harmony with each other to create a broad, unified school culture. If a principal can't coach one of these teacher learner profiles, they are likely missing a number of teachers in their building. Szakacs says this balance is “the foundation for school culture: Teachers trust their leaders to the extent that they have made decisions on instructional strategies that support each of these motivations.” To help school leaders support each learner type, NIET staff asks school leaders during learning walks to make observations that correspond to each learner type so that they are prepared to coach all teacher learning styles. Coaches

notice the difference. "I finally realize what coaching is about," said a Knox County instructional coach. "Before partnering with NIET, I had all these relationships where I would go in and tell these teachers what to do, yet nothing would change."

TAKING OWNERSHIP OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The strong support and reinforcement from NIET help build small early wins among the teaching staff that begin to shift the culture. These small wins often happen around the same time that schools leaders are feeling comfortable with their new coaching approach and taking full ownership of their instructional leadership. Each win gives them more confidence, deepening their commitment and setting in motion a virtuous cycle of improvement, which transforms school culture and increases collective efficacy.

"I can provide my students greater opportunities for engagement."

Mellichamp Teacher

As coaches continue to focus coaching conversations on student work, they implicitly model a common language around instruction that teachers begin to adopt. In only a few months of work in Knox County and Mellichamp Elementary, gaining this common language and knowing that everyone is working to improve have opened the doors to new teacher collaboration. Teachers have started meeting to deconstruct standards, discuss ways to give more thinking and problem-solving time to students, and create standards-aligned success criteria for student work. "Through this analysis with my colleagues, I have realized there are activities in my lesson plan I can take out that really are not as beneficial in helping my students master the lesson's objective," said a veteran teacher at Mellichamp. "By making a tweak to the plan I can provide my students greater opportunities for engagement." These critical revelations have not only led to more

effective instruction, but are also celebrated by the staff in the building and have contributed to a renewed positive and productive school culture.

SUSTAINING AND EXPANDING IMPROVEMENT THROUGH COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

The schools' trajectories are having a ripple effect in their communities. The improvement strategies in Mellichamp have been recognized by Orangeburg 5 leaders and are shaping whole district strategy and trainings for leaders. The transformation from "priority" to model school has only bolstered Mellichamp's confidence and has motivated staff to keep up their good work.

These schools are also potentially on a path to adding additional instructional leadership roles and structures for professional learning, which are strong tools for sustaining learning gains. As teachers establish a common instructional language and begin to see the fruits of their labor, they often begin to ask for greater supports, which opens the door to embedding a defined system of professional learning.

Already in one semester, Knox and Mellichamp have seen teacher collaboration blossom. As their culture of collaboration continues to grow, they may choose to elevate teacher leaders to instructional leadership roles or expand their time spent in structured professional learning communities.

Whether working within existing structures and initiatives like in Orangeburg and Knox or bringing in a new infrastructure for professional learning in Premont ISD, the core focus of NIET's work is helping build school cultures that make student learning the focus of all instructional strategies. Once a school has established excellent instruction and a reflective culture, they are prepared to engage in collaborative learning and collective leadership that allows for profound student learning gains. While NIET realizes there are different ways to approach school improvement, our mission remains the same: ensuring that every student has an excellent teacher. ■



DELIVERING High-Quality Curricula

WHAT EDUCATORS NEED TO KNOW

AT A GLANCE: Louisiana has made adopting high-quality (or Tier 1) curricula a primary focus of the state's improvement plan for K-12 schools. This shift requires making high-quality instructional materials more broadly accessible and supporting teachers in understanding and using them.

Implementing a Tier 1 curriculum is a major challenge for teachers, principals and district leaders. Higher expectations for students create higher expectations for classroom instruction, and this is even more challenging for teachers in high-need schools with more students working below grade level.

“When students struggle with new and more challenging material, their teachers need support in anticipating those struggles and being prepared to make adjustments for students to be successful,” explains NIET Senior Trainer Teddy Broussard. “Tier 1 curricula is the ‘what’ and school-based structures and supports for teachers are the ‘how.’”

To be effective, teachers need ongoing, job-embedded professional learning that enables them to deeply understand the content and intent of a high-quality curriculum while simultaneously shifting their own instructional practices to enable their students to meet higher expectations.

THE NEED FOR HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULA

In 2016, Louisiana adopted college and career ready standards or “Louisiana Student Standards,” which set higher expectations for student learning across the state.

Districts started looking for curricula aligned to the new standards, but had difficulty identifying the best options or struggled to train teachers on the new options. Too many teachers continued to use resources, such as Pinterest, to find materials.

To offer more specific guidance, the state department of education undertook a review of curricula to determine the alignment with higher, more challenging standards. With statewide involvement of educators, the department created an overall ranking of curricula. Their analysis resulted in ratings for curricula that reflect whether instructional materials address new state standards, with Tier 1 curricula being most closely aligned. These ratings provide districts with information to evaluate various curricular resources.

“Tier 1 curricula are really important because they help our students to think in a more complex way, and access the type of reading, writing, computing and thinking they will face in college and beyond,” says Faydra Alexander, executive director of instruction in the Algiers Charter School Association located in New Orleans. We need to prepare our students for that.”

Sarah Guidry, executive master teacher in East Feliciana Parish, agrees: “Getting the right instructional materials is key to moving students.”

UNDERSTANDING THE DEPTH OF THE NEW CURRICULA

Even as districts moved to adopt the new curricula, their professional learning systems were often stuck in the past. “Indicators showed that districts were investing in high-quality curricula and resources, but few teachers felt they had the professional development support to implement the new curricula,” notes Louisiana Department of Education Executive Director of Talent Pipeline Jennifer Tuttleton. “We spent the last three years working to address this challenge by

building cadres of teachers capable of supporting other teachers. This included developing content leaders and mentor teachers as well as teacher leaders who deeply understood the new curricula. In all, we trained over 1,500 teacher leaders and 20,000 teachers.”

The increased learning expectations in the new curricula are substantial. NIET Senior Program Specialist Lindsey Parker describes the change using an English language arts (ELA) example:

BEFORE

The old ELA instruction might be characterized by using a text from the novel “Hatchet,” about a boy surviving on his own in the wilderness.

Teachers would ask, “Who was the main character? What are some of the events or challenges he faced? How did those experiences impact him?”

AFTER

Now, students are expected to read the novel as well as nonfiction texts on the topic of wilderness survival. The unit assessment asks students to select an event from the novel and describe how the main character’s actions aided or hindered his survival.

Students are asked, “Does the novel have value as a survival guide? Make a claim and provide reasons and evidence about the instructional value of the novel as a survival guide using both the fiction and nonfiction texts.”

This requires teachers to redefine how they approach the lesson, to think about how students will analyze texts and apply their learning in a new context. The curriculum expects students to understand and analyze the novel, and become capable of applying that knowledge within and outside the genre.

WHERE HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULA MEETS THE CLASSROOM

As executive director of the LA BOLD initiative and NIET's lead in Louisiana, Vicky Condalary works with partner districts across the state to ensure that teachers and principals understand the new curriculum and how to change their instructional practices to deliver it with integrity. A federal Teacher and School Leader Incentive grant provides resources to spur innovative practices that can later be expanded both within the grant districts, and across other districts and charter networks in the state.

"We work side by side with educators as they focus on what needs to happen at the classroom, school and district level," she shares. "This ensures that a Tier 1 curriculum is delivered to students in a way that supports their success in learning at high levels. We work with our partner districts to identify needs as they arise, and together create solutions to strengthen the implementation in classrooms and schools."

"We work with our partner districts to identify needs as they arise, and together create solutions to strengthen the implementation in classrooms and schools."

Vicky Condalary

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LA BOLD



Challenges for Teachers

Teachers needed help both anticipating where their students would struggle with the new learning, and identifying supports for these students. “Teachers were attempting to implement the new curriculum and really struggled with pacing and differentiating,” Condalary explains. “Some teachers felt like their students weren’t ready for the more challenging standards and lessons that required them to think more and differently. This began impacting school culture and climate — which is so important for student learning — as students were overwhelmed and teachers struggled to shape effective lessons.”

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW CURRICULA AND INSTRUCTIONAL DEMANDS

“Teachers cannot just read the script from the new curriculum, cherry pick questions from the script or skim the surface of engagement,” Condalary says. “Principals would observe this type of scripted instruction and pre-suppose it was successful because it was following the new curriculum. What was often overlooked was the missing rigor and depth of the lesson compared to the new standards.” The result, Condalary emphasizes, was that students were not successful on the assessments

since they had not engaged in the deep critical thinking required by the new curriculum.

As the new standards and curricula were rolled out, it was clear that principals, teacher leaders and coaches needed a deeper knowledge of the new curricula. District executive master teachers, NIET trainers and state team members decided to work together to plan a lesson using the new curriculum. They identified the steps needed to plan effectively and the importance of working through the material as a team. It was clear that teachers and teacher leaders would need time and space to work collaboratively to explore curricula in order to understand how units are organized, review available resources, and identify instructional practices that need to be considered during delivery of that lesson.

COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND INDIVIDUAL COACHING BY TEACHER LEADERS

Parker describes the importance of weekly professional learning (cluster) meetings where teacher leaders who have “gone first” in teaching the curriculum support their colleagues. For example, she describes a math cluster



where teachers analyzed what happened during a lesson on fractions, and problems students encountered.

“Some students lacked math fluency skills—multiplication in this case—and were taking ten times as long on each problem,” she says. “How can we help them to overcome that hurdle? If the objective of the lesson is understanding operations with fractions, let’s teach those students support strategies to use so they can master the fifth-grade objective without a deficiency in a third-grade skill getting in the way during core instruction. At the same time, let’s plan with teachers how they will continue to

support those students to build their math fluency skills during other parts of the school day.”

Another lesson was that teacher leaders and coaches need to teach a class every day using a Tier 1 curriculum. This helps them understand what is needed to successfully implement the curriculum—whether it’s assessment, structure, pacing, or differentiation—before coaching others. Some district leaders were initially resistant to this idea, but soon realized that the quality of cluster and coaching were not strong enough and would not improve without changes.

Challenges for Principals

Principals faced challenges understanding whether the curricula were being implemented at the intended level of depth and rigor in every classroom, and how to support teachers who needed help. They felt pressure to tell teachers to stick to the script and pacing to ensure all students were exposed to grade-level material, even when adjustments were clearly necessary for some students.

BUILDING PRINCIPALS’ KNOWLEDGE FIRST

“One of the things we found early on—and had been a misstep in our previous efforts with a new curriculum—was that we had to build the knowledge base of our principals in the new curricula,” says Alexander.

“Principals think they need to correct a teacher who is making an adjustment to the lesson, but that teacher might be doing exactly what is needed for students to learn the material.”

Teddy Broussard

NIET SENIOR TRAINER

“They needed to understand the depth of knowledge expected of students ahead of their teachers.”

Broussard recalls how one principal observing a teacher’s Tier 1 curriculum lesson remarked, “But she isn’t reading the script!” as a teacher made an adjustment to support students who were struggling with the lesson.

“Principals think they need to correct a teacher who is making an adjustment to the lesson,” he explains, “But that teacher might be doing exactly what is needed for students to learn the material. She might have added a mini-lesson in an area where students struggled, or asked students to turn and talk to a neighbor at a particular moment. Teacher leaders, instructional coaches, principals and others who support teachers need to provide professional development for them and guidance in knowing when and how to make those adjustments in ways that support individual student learning. At the same time, they need to maintain the integrity and rigor of the curriculum and standards being addressed.”

CREATING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRINCIPALS

Another strategy being piloted by NIET is to build networks of principals across the state, using in-person meetings and regular communications. Guidry describes

how her district took the experience of the statewide principals meeting and brought it home, creating a monthly principal meeting in the district. “Our principals love collaborating with their peers, including those in other districts,” she says. “During one of our first monthly principals’ meetings here in East Feliciana, we had them doing data analysis and understanding how much growth they could make in ELA if they moved

kids that were within ten points of the standard. It helped them to see how to meet their goals through a series of key steps.”

Adds Tuttleton, “One of the most important ways we are supporting principals is in understanding what it takes, and the trade-offs required, to create time and space for collaborative ongoing professional learning.”

Challenges at the District Level

“At the district level, curriculum specialists found it challenging to implement the curriculum at the right pace,” describes Condalary. “A lot of districts introduced multiple new instructional materials all at once, overwhelming teachers. Teachers were accustomed to lessons flowing step by step from a written plan, but the new curriculum required a lot more scaffolding and questioning.” With new curriculum comes new vendors who are in and out of classrooms. This led to a lot of “noise” and competing programs at the classroom level.

look like in a classroom for teachers? What does it look like from the perspective of a content area or grade level? What do people at each layer of the system need to be successful?”

“What is powerful about our partnership with NIET over the years,” Alexander adds, “is they provide non-judgmental support, and the right support at the right time. They walk with us in the work and are willing to own the results with us.”

CREATING COHERENCE IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Districts can play a key role in creating coherence in professional learning. For example, a small rural parish working with NIET has five partners providing professional learning support in their district: TNTP, LSU Cain Center, LearnZillion, NIET and LDOE network coaches. Working with district leaders, NIET is blending its support with the work of other vendors to create coherence for teachers. Regular phone calls help to ensure that all partners are aware of what is being provided for teachers, and identify opportunities to streamline and speak with one voice. LDOE has also recognized the problem and changed their grant process to require that applicants plan for coordination of partners and vendors.

The Louisiana experience demonstrates that teachers need significant support in implementing a Tier 1 curriculum, and much of this support must be embedded in their daily work. NIET’s work with district partners illustrates how to create supports at the district, school and classroom level that enable teachers to use high-quality instructional materials to help every student meet high expectations for learning.

SUPPORTING DISTRICT LEADERS

“More and more I see that there needs to be someone at the district level who understands this work deeply and at multiple levels,” notes Alexander. “What does it

“NIET provides non-judgmental support, and the right support at the right time. They walk with us in the work and are willing to own the results with us.”

Faydra Alexander

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF INSTRUCTION,
ALGIERS CHARTER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

Tackling District Needs Head On: Lessons Learned

1. **Establish regular communication opportunities** between State Department of Education leaders and district leaders to discuss priorities and needs around implementation of Tier I curricula.
2. **Work alongside district leaders to “go first” and dig into the curriculum** to plan lessons and label the process used. For example, NIET worked with district-based executive master teachers to plan lessons from the new curricula, deepening their understanding of the content, instructional strategies, planning and assessment.
3. **Support district leaders, teacher leaders and principals** to strengthen their understanding of Tier 1 curricula through role-specific opportunities for collaboration throughout the year. This work began in LA BOLD districts and will be extended to other partners outside the grant.
4. **Assist districts and school leaders** to understand how teacher professional learning needs to be embedded to implement Tier 1 curricula, and how to plan, deliver and measure the impact of professional learning on student and teacher growth.
5. **Empower teacher leaders** experienced with the new curricula—and trained to work with adults—to lead job-embedded professional learning.
6. **Engage teacher leaders, along with school leaders, in coaching individual teachers** in their classrooms to support transference of new learning to every classroom.
7. **Include teacher leaders in school leadership teams** to build instructional leadership and advance instructional goals.
8. **Help leaders develop, stay focused, and track progress on goals.**
9. **Provide assistance to district leaders in coordinating outside partners** in order to streamline and create coherence or “one voice” in support for teachers. ■



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."

"Beech Grove, Perry and Decatur lined up and said, 'You're working with NIET; we want to work with you.'"

Dr. Kenith C. Britt

DEAN · KLIPSCH EDUCATORS COLLEGE
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

“NIET’s approach truly is a comprehensive system based on tangible evidence and full feedback loops — not just a ticksheet of numbers and ratings.”

Dr. Paula Calderon

DEAN · SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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

THE NIET Difference

LASTING PARTNERSHIPS PRODUCE LARGE-SCALE GAINS

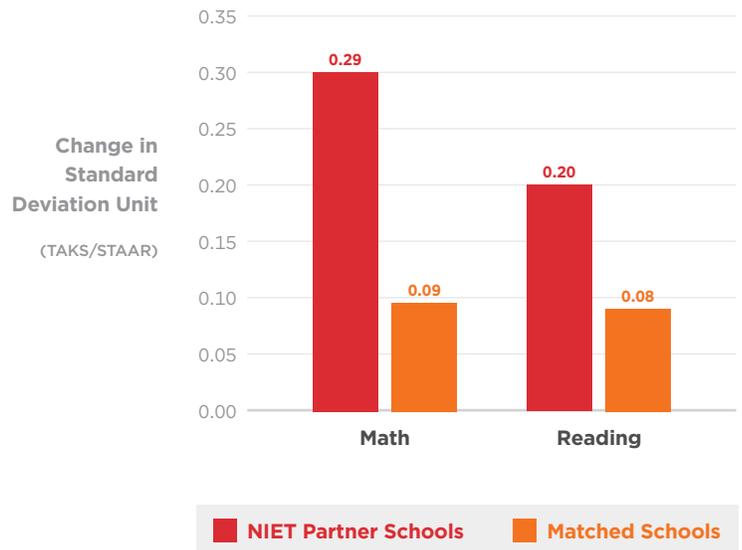
Large-scale transformations take lasting partnerships. Over the past two decades, research has shown that NIET's initiatives can positively impact student achievement, especially in schools that sustain partnerships for multiple years. Two recent studies demonstrate the success of NIET's long-term partnerships with high-need schools across Texas and Louisiana.

Texas

A 2018 study indicates that NIET Texas partner schools outperformed matched schools in math and reading. As shown in Figure 1, the 28 schools that partnered with NIET for at least two consecutive years outperformed their propensity matched schools by an average of 0.20 standard deviations in math and by an average of 0.12 standard deviations in reading. Additionally, while the average student achievement growth in NIET partner schools was statistically significant for math and reading, the average student achievement growth in matched schools did not reach statistical significance for either subject area.

FIGURE 1

Texas Partner Schools Outperform Matched Schools in Student Achievement Growth

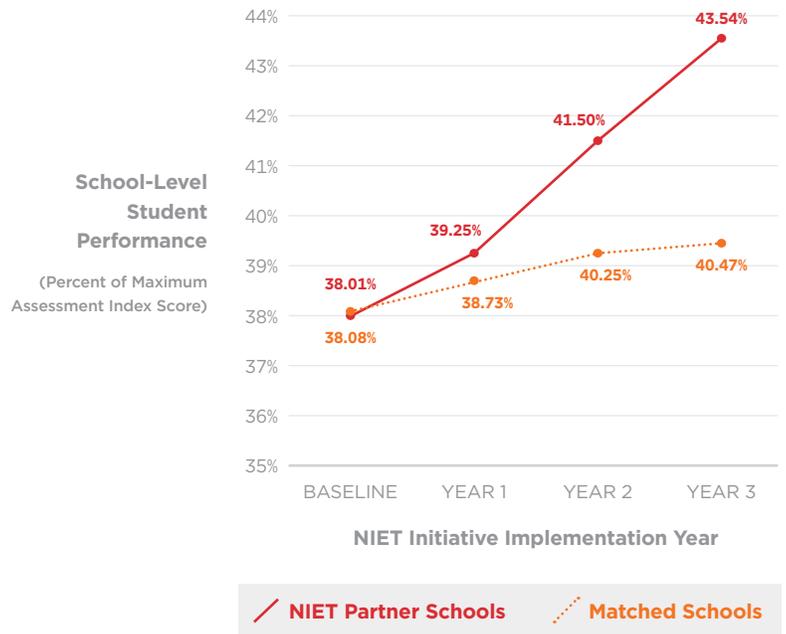


Louisiana

A 2018 study found more rapid and sustained student achievement in a sample of 42 Louisiana schools that partnered with NIET for at least three consecutive years, compared to 42 propensity score matched schools. As shown in Figure 2, NIET partner and matched schools initially performed at similar levels (i.e., at baseline), but NIET partner schools began to outperform matched schools in the first year of the partnership and the gap widened over time. By the third year, the difference in student performance between NIET partner and matched schools reached statistical significance.

For more information on NIET’s research, visit niet.org. ■

FIGURE 2
Louisiana Partner Schools Outperform Matched Schools in Student Achievement



NIET at AERA

After a highly selective review process, the American Educational Research Association (AERA)—the nation’s largest education research society—accepted six NIET studies to be presented at its 2018 Annual Meeting in New York. The event drew 15,000 education researchers from across the globe to attend over 2,500 sessions. The studies, chosen for their rigor and depth, covered a range of topics illustrating the impact of NIET’s partnerships on student achievement, teacher and school leader effectiveness, new teacher and principal preparation, and school culture:

Building Leadership Capacity Locally: Evaluating the Impact of the Leadership Instruction for Teachers (LIFT) Program

In Their Own Words: National Study on Administrator Attitudes of Educator Effectiveness

Rural and Ready: Impact Evaluation of an Educator Effectiveness System in Rural Tennessee

Teacher Voices: National Study of Teacher Views of an Educator Effectiveness System

The Innovation Pipeline: National Model for Transforming Pre-Service to In-Service Training through Effective Educator Development

Thriving in Texas: Impact Evaluation of an Educator Effectiveness System on Student Achievement



“Investing in people is imperative to achieving transformational change in America’s highest-need schools.”

Lowell Milken

NIET CHAIRMAN AND FOUNDER



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TAP is funded in part by multiyear federal Teacher Incentive Fund grants awarded to the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

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