

**NIET**

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

# Generating Excellence in Classrooms Across America



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# Letter from Leadership



with district partners across the state boosted the adoption and success of these state initiatives to accelerate student learning growth and close historic gaps.

In Tennessee, NIET played an instrumental role in the adoption of a stronger system for observation and feedback through the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM). This year, more than a decade after the initial adoption, nine in 10 teachers continued to report that their evaluation is helping them grow their skills. In Arkansas, over 1,300 teachers have stepped up to earn teacher leader designations through advanced training and on-site coaching from NIET. Designated lead teachers provide strong mentoring for new teachers, and master teachers offer high-impact coaching in math and literacy. Teachers in both of these leadership roles earn additional compensation in Arkansas.

In Texas, the Teacher Incentive Allotment provides a powerful model of performance-based compensation to increase the number of effective teachers in high-need and rural areas. NIET is a key partner in this multiyear effort, lending expertise in the development of the calibration and certification system, partnering with districts to build their performance and support plans, and creating an extensive library of classroom lessons and content to support teachers across the state.

NIET's model provide a return on investment of 14 to 1. For the last three years, our partners have been recognized for the World's Best School Prizes in the categories of Overcoming Adversity and Building Community, making NIET the only U.S.-based organization with three partner schools winning this prestigious international recognition.

In this report, we share seven examples of states adopting these practices that offer powerful proof points of the impact of a comprehensive approach to improvement. We see enormous potential as states continue to scale the most effective, proven district practices to improve teaching and learning. We look forward to extending this work in the year ahead, generating excellence in teaching and growth in student success in all partnerships.

**Best wishes,**  
**Lowell Milken, Founder**  
**Gary Stark, Chairman**  
**Joshua H. Barnett, Chief Executive Officer**

## Investing in People, Not Programs

### NIET partners,

Across the country, effective teachers are achieving remarkable results with students. Unfortunately, there are not enough of them. The challenge for educators and leaders is to identify and extend effective instructional practices and build systems to generate excellence in every classroom.

As control over education policy shifts to states, it is increasingly clear how important state policy is in taking high-impact district practices and scaling them statewide. NIET is playing a key role in supporting

innovative and impactful state policies based on our 25 years of experience guiding districts to outperform expectations and improve instruction across all classrooms.

Multiple state partners have helped lead the "Southern surge" in test score growth on the Nation's Report Card (NAEP). Among the leaders in growth is Louisiana, which, over the last decade, has implemented instructional best practices policies across the state and incentivized the adoption and effective use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). The strong foundations NIET helped to build

We know a comprehensive approach to increasing teacher and leader effectiveness has longer-term positive impacts on economic and social measures, and that teacher leaders are the key driver of that impact. The seminal 2023 study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that the benefits of



# Growing Evidence of NIET's Impact

Over the past 25 years, NIET has grown to impact over 3.5 million students and 350,000 educators. As NIET partners have transformed practices and led innovation, our work together has been recognized by prominent national publications, research organizations, and international education organizations.

## NIET'S SUPPORT LEADS TO NATIONAL RECOGNITION AND INCREASES IN STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The success of NIET partners has gained national attention, with prominent news outlets like *The Boston Globe*, *NPR*, and *Education Week* spotlighting partners.



## NIET PARTNERS EARN INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM THROUGH WORLD'S BEST SCHOOLS PRIZES PROGRAM

NIET partner schools have been internationally recognized for World's Best School Prizes in the categories of Community Collaboration, Overcoming Adversity, and Building Community.

Not only are these tremendous celebrations for the school communities, but they also make NIET the only U.S.-based organization with three partner schools recognized through this prestigious international award program.



**CROSS COUNTY ELEMENTARY TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY (CCETA)**, located in Cross County, Arkansas, was selected in 2025 as one of 10 finalists for the World's Best School Prizes in the Overcoming Adversity category. CCETA was recognized for its dedication to excellence in teaching and learning, and its efforts to build resilience and lifelong skills for success among rural students.

**WOODMERE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**, located in Louisiana's Jefferson Parish School System, was a 2024 top-10 finalist in the World's Best School Prizes' Overcoming Adversity category. Even through Hurricanes Ida and Katrina, the Woodmere community remained united, and students have shown academic growth.

**WILLIAM HENRY BURKHART ELEMENTARY** in Perry Township Schools, Indiana, was selected as one of 10 finalists in 2023 for the World's Best School Prizes in the Community Collaboration category. Burkhardt Elementary is dedicated to providing high-quality instruction and a positive learning environment to all students, including the large population of Burmese refugees who have joined the community over the past two decades.



# Louisiana Leads the Nation in Student Learning Growth



NIET's partners in **LOUISIANA** have invested in high-impact professional learning and coaching that improves instruction and student learning. As student achievement across academic subjects and grades outpaces expectations, these effective practices are increasingly reflected in state

policy. Through a partnership with the Louisiana Department of Education, NIET delivers high-impact, statewide training and on-site support to strengthen observation, feedback, and coaching practices aligned to the Louisiana Educator Advancement and Development System (LEADS).



# Investing in Educators Drives a ‘Southern Surge’ in Student Learning Growth

Louisiana is leading the nation in student growth, resulting in recognition as part of a “Southern surge” among states achieving historic learning gains. The state’s commitment to increasing expectations for students while simultaneously increasing the coaching and support provided to teachers has set an example for how states can improve student success.



## UNLEASHING THE EXPERTISE AND TALENT OF TEACHER LEADERS

Recognizing the talent within schools and classrooms, many school systems are creating teacher leadership roles to staff schools more strategically and drive continuous improvement within existing budgets.

Including teacher leaders in instructional leadership teams has proven to be a highly successful strategy. Elevating teachers into leadership roles provides classroom teachers with more relevant, timely, actionable support while also creating new professional opportunities and career pathways for educators.

This year, NIET partner Natchitoches Parish School Board was nationally recognized in *The Boston Globe* for its use of teacher leaders to facilitate weekly teacher collaboration meetings and provide individual coaching for teachers. The strategic use of teacher leaders drove significant improvements in educator effectiveness and student achievement, with the district earning its highest-ever district performance score and rising from a state ranking of 43rd in 2020 to 22nd in 2025.

“Louisiana’s partnership with NIET has been a win for teachers and students. I’ve seen the power of NIET’s work firsthand, and their collaboration and support provide opportunities for educators and students to thrive.”

**DR. CADE BRUMLEY**  
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION, LOUISIANA



## HIGH-QUALITY OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK THROUGH LEADS

Responding to educators looking for high-quality, actionable feedback and follow-up support in classrooms, the Louisiana Educator Advancement and Development System (LEADS) is strengthening instructional practices across the state. Built on evidence-based rubrics of instructional practice, LEADS connects feedback from observations to a coaching cycle — supporting teachers to continuously improve classroom instruction using high-quality instructional materials (HQIM).

As part of this initiative, NIET provides training in high-quality observation and feedback practices across the state and supports districts in building collaborative professional learning systems and coaching cycles for teachers to strengthen classroom practices.





**SPOTLIGHT:**

## Great Classroom Teaching in Jefferson Parish Schools

Mentor teachers have an impact in Jefferson Parish Schools. Sarah Watkins, a mentor teacher at Stella Worley Middle School in Jefferson Parish Schools, was recognized this year for great classroom teaching as a surprise recipient of the Milken Educator Award.

As a mentor teacher, Sarah coaches teachers, models instructional strategies, and facilitates teacher collaborative learning. By extending the reach of strong classroom teachers like Sarah, Jefferson Parish is building instructional excellence across classrooms and improving outcomes for students — helping Louisiana lead the nation in student learning growth.

**LOUISIANA'S INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS ARE PAYING OFF**

**4 YEARS**

**OF CONSECUTIVE STUDENT GROWTH**

Louisiana is the only state to make significant growth in both reading and math National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores over the last four years.

## Arkansas Invests in Educators to Reach Student Learning Goals



**ARKANSAS** is investing in teachers and leaders by improving feedback, strengthening coaching, and offering additional compensation to help districts achieve ambitious student learning goals. NIET is the top provider of statewide training for lead teachers to earn designations as mentors for new

teachers, and for master teachers to earn designations as coaches for math and literacy. The high-impact training and on-site support being provided for teacher leaders and instructional leadership teams reinforce years of successful partnerships between NIET and the state's rural districts.



## Arkansas Aligns Expectations and Support for Educators

Over the last three years, Arkansas has made historic changes to K-12 education, including new requirements for third grade literacy, increased teacher compensation, opportunities for teacher leadership, and more accurate and useful feedback for teachers. NIET has played a key role in supporting the state to build alignment between these initiatives, so that each piece of the policy framework leverages and reinforces other elements.



### PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY FEEDBACK ON INSTRUCTION

NIET is supporting the Arkansas Department of Education through a three-year initiative to improve the feedback teachers and principals receive and build greater consistency in evaluations. The initiative trains evaluators to conduct high-quality observations and provide strong coaching feedback, supporting improvements in practice and creating a path for educators to qualify for merit-based recognition. Training will be based on the state's Teacher Excellence and Support System (TESS) and Leader Excellence and Development System (LEADS).

### INCENTIVIZING TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Arkansas created two teacher leadership designations, lead and master educator, with statewide training and on-site coaching for these roles. NIET is the largest trainer of lead and master educators in Arkansas, having supported over 1,300 teachers to earn a Professional Educator Designation, and is currently training the first cohorts of math and English language arts coaches to earn the Master Professional Educator Designation.

The state approves providers of teacher leader training and credentialing, creating quality control measures to ensure consistency in the skills of teacher leaders. This growing cohort of trained teacher leaders provides high-quality mentoring for new teachers and coaching in math and ELA. Teacher candidates must be placed in the classroom of a lead or master teacher, providing a strong incentive for a school to have certified lead or master teachers in place. In addition, if a student fails to meet the state's third grade

promotion requirements, that student can satisfy the requirements by being placed in a master teacher's classroom. Teacher leaders can earn state merit pay in multiple ways: through their own classroom impact, for teaching in a high-need and rural area, and for teaching in a shortage area.



“The training reminded me that being a teacher is not just about checking boxes or getting through the day. It’s about constantly growing, supporting others, and keeping our focus on what matters most: helping kids.”

**REBECCA ELLIOTT**

**SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER,  
RIVERVIEW SCHOOL DISTRICT**





**SPOTLIGHT:**

## Commitment to Teacher Support Earns International Recognition

In 2025, Cross County Elementary Technology Academy (CCETA) in Cross County School District was selected as one of 10 international finalists for T4 Education's prestigious World's Best School Prizes in the Overcoming Adversity category, which celebrates schools that see challenges and obstacles as opportunities to learn and grow.

CCETA was recognized for its dedication to excellence in teaching and learning and for its efforts to build resilience and lifelong skills for success among students. As a rural school with limited access to resources, CCETA has found ways to ensure its students and educators can thrive. A long-standing partnership with NIET helps build instructional excellence and strengthen collaboration and support for educators.

Over the past five years, the school's teacher retention rate has reached 96%, thanks to CCETA's commitment to teacher support and coaching.

## Texas Advances Great Classroom Teaching

**NIET IS THE TOP CHOICE FOR LEAD AND MASTER EDUCATOR DESIGNATION TRAINING**

**1,300**

**LEAD AND MASTER PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR DESIGNATIONS EARNED**

**Teachers across Arkansas participate in NIET's training and on-site support to earn lead and master educator designations. NIET is proud to have supported over 1,300 teachers in earning designations since the program began, making it the largest provider in the state.**



**TEXAS** has adopted innovative approaches to providing districts with funding to increase educator effectiveness, including allocating funds for incentive pay for teachers, strengthening mentoring for new teachers, and supporting the implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM).

NIET is proud to work with districts across the state that are developing their own innovative practices in addition to leveraging state initiatives such as the Teacher Incentive Allotment and the Learning Acceleration Support Opportunities grants to improve outcomes for students.



## Fueling Innovation in Staffing and Compensation

As states look for new ways to support districts to be more innovative in the use of staff and budgets, Texas provides a strong example of how strategic staffing and compensation incentives can make a difference. Multiyear investments in strategic compensation and mentorship at the state level, along with new initiatives to support the implementation of high-quality curricula, are fueling improvements in classroom instruction.

### REWARDING TEACHER PERFORMANCE AND TEACHER LEADERS

The Texas Incentive Allotment (TIA) recognizes and rewards teacher performance, boosting recruitment and retention of effective teachers with awards weighted more heavily in high-need and rural schools. With state-level funds available for effective teachers, school districts are eager to put in place systems of support to help their teachers grow and access these funds. Up to 10% of the funding districts receive through TIA can be used for costs associated with implementing and maintaining their TIA system, including teacher leadership and professional development.

In South San Antonio Independent School District, Superintendent Saul Hinojosa is leveraging TIA funds to create a system of teacher leadership to build instructional capacity and skills across the district,

resulting in stronger classroom instruction and higher teacher and school leader retention. Stronger instructional skills and knowledge enable teachers to more effectively use high-quality curricula and differentiate instruction to meet each student's needs.



### STRENGTHENING MENTORING FOR NEW TEACHERS

As districts work to implement new, high-quality curricula, funding for mentor programs is another state-level initiative that is proving essential in supporting early-career teachers to be successful. NIET helps districts build mentorship programs that strengthen mentor skills across a range of topics, such as data analysis, high-quality feedback on instructional practices, supporting adult learners, and creating cycles of continuous improvement. The role of mentor offers the most effective teachers an opportunity to contribute to schoolwide improvement while giving new teachers high-quality support for their own development.

In Cotulla Independent School District, mentor teachers play a critical role in a comprehensive system that includes teacher collaborative professional learning, classroom observation and coaching, and a schoolwide instructional leadership team deeply engaged in classroom teaching and learning. State funding for mentor teachers offers a powerful boost, along with TIA funds, as districts develop more innovative and responsive systems to address educational challenges.



“Teacher leaders are the key to making a system of continuous improvement possible. Elevating teachers into instructional leadership roles and compensating them is critical to our success.”

**DR. SAUL HINOJOSA**

**SUPERINTENDENT,  
SOUTH SAN ANTONIO INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**





**SPOTLIGHT:**

## Somerset High School Equips Graduates with Career Readiness

Somerset High School in the Somerset Independent School District was recognized as the 2025 NIET Founder's Award winner. With support from NIET, Somerset High established weekly professional learning meetings facilitated by teacher leaders and created opportunities for customized coaching. Additionally, teacher leaders provide the individualized coaching and feedback teachers need to reach all students.

As a rural high school, Somerset is committed to providing a high-quality education with a wide variety of instructional experiences that prepares students for college, career, and military success. Not only is the school home to an award-winning mariachi band, but it also offers an impressive number of career and technical education (CTE) programs.

Somerset High's CTE classes, which result in college credit, include an EMT academy, an agriculture mechanics class, and a culinary arts program, among others. Regardless of their next steps after high school, Somerset High graduates are prepared for success.

# Arizona Builds a Pipeline of Strong Instructional Leaders

TEACHER  
LEADERS  
BOOST  
TEACHER  
RETENTION

# 91%

OF SCHOOL LEADERS  
REPORTED THAT  
TEACHER LEADERS  
HAD A POSITIVE  
IMPACT ON  
RETAINING TEACHERS  
IN THEIR SCHOOLS.

As many districts struggle to staff classrooms, NIET partners in Texas are increasing teacher retention through support from teacher leaders. Teacher leaders provide teachers with the feedback and coaching that they need to feel successful and remain in the classroom.



School districts across **ARIZONA** partner with NIET to design innovative staffing practices that ensure every student has access to effective teachers. This work, which centers on teacher leadership, provides career opportunities for educators and

enhances the quality of classroom instruction as teacher leaders become experts in implementing rigorous literacy and math curricula. Over time, building the skills and knowledge of teacher leaders strengthens the leadership development pipeline.



## Arizona Excels with NIET's Strategic Staffing Support

NIET is at the forefront of innovative staffing in Arizona, with a proven track record of improving student outcomes by increasing teacher effectiveness. Core to this approach is a model for creating systems that grow talent through teacher leadership roles. The successes achieved by NIET school and district partners over more than two decades of work are direct results of this investment and evidence of its value.



### NEW STATE FUNDING HELPS DISTRICTS STRENGTHEN MATH INSTRUCTION

Recognizing the impact a comprehensive approach has on improving instruction, the Arizona Department of Education has turned to NIET to support districts in addressing student learning gaps in math. The Direct Student Services grant funds the addition of math coaches in districts where students struggle to meet academic standards. As a nationally recognized provider of support for the implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), NIET partners with districts to ensure their math instruction leads to learning growth for students.

The diverse needs of students and the high expectations of a rigorous curriculum require not just initial training on curricula, but ongoing shoulder-to-shoulder support to improve instructional practices. This initiative creates new resources to support effective teachers in sharing their expertise and building a pipeline to grow the strongest teachers into leaders at the school and district levels.

As seen in NIET partnerships across the state, team-based structures led by teacher leaders address challenges with the traditional teacher role, reducing isolation, creating career pathways, increasing teacher retention, and increasing opportunities to collaborate, learn, and grow.

### INNOVATIVE STAFFING CREATES A CAREER PATHWAY FOR TEACHERS

NIET's impact is also evident in the growing number of leaders who build their skills and knowledge in teacher leader positions and go on to lead their schools and districts. After serving as a teacher leader in Gadsden Elementary School District #32, Omar Duron became the superintendent of Somerton School District No. 11. He credits an investment in people — not programs — for fueling his success in growing teacher and school leader effectiveness and student achievement.



“It is essential to recognize the leadership potential in every teacher and encourage their continued professional growth, as it expands their ability to positively impact more students.”

**OMAR DURON**  
SUPERINTENDENT,  
SOMERTON SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 11





**SPOTLIGHT:**

## Celebrating Excellence in Gadsden Elementary School District #32

For its focus on supporting excellent instruction and improving student performance, Gadsden Elementary School District #32 was recognized with NIET's 2025 District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness. Gadsden serves a unique and diverse community, with 100% of students qualifying for free- or reduced-price lunch and 98% of students entering the district enrolled as English language learners. All students in Gadsden receive high-quality instruction from educators who benefit from continuous, tailored feedback and coaching.

Gadsden's 15-year partnership with NIET has helped the district establish a cadre of teacher leaders who, alongside school leaders, facilitate job-embedded professional learning and provide teachers with individualized coaching and support. Gadsden's teacher leadership model has created a pipeline of local instructional leaders who are prepared to support their colleagues to meet students' academic and developmental needs. Gadsden's educators and students have thrived as a result of the district's investments in teacher leadership.

**TEACHER LEADERSHIP POSITIVELY IMPACTS TEACHER RETENTION**

**95%**

**OF SCHOOL LEADERS REPORTED THAT TEACHER LEADERS HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT ON TEACHER RETENTION.**

**NIET's Arizona partners use teacher leadership as a strategy to increase teacher effectiveness and improve retention. When a school has teacher leaders, teachers feel more supported and are more likely to return year after year.**

## Tennessee Improves Literacy Instruction Statewide

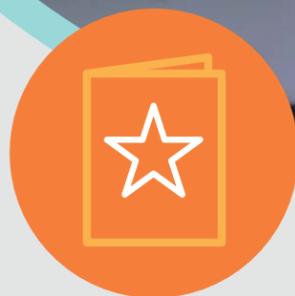


As **TENNESSEE** set higher expectations for student literacy, the state also invested in professional learning for educators to strengthen their understanding and use of instructional best practices. NIET partners with districts to help them

implement structures, including teacher leadership roles and instructional leadership teams, that facilitate high-quality professional learning in literacy and other subjects.

# Tennessee's Focus on Literacy Instruction Builds on Years of Progress

As a nationally recognized expert in the implementation of high-quality literacy curricula, NIET has deep experience supporting districts and schools with high-quality professional learning in literacy. Approved as a provider by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), NIET worked with districts across the state to strengthen literacy outcomes through the Literacy Implementation Networks and the Early Literacy Network. What sets this work apart is that NIET goes beyond initial curriculum implementation to build the expertise of teams. As a result, partner districts in Tennessee help students make significant and sustained reading gains.



## GRANT EXTENDS LITERACY IMPROVEMENTS TO SECONDARY GRADES

Looking ahead, NIET is expanding work at the middle and high school levels as an approved provider for the state's Comprehensive Literacy State Development grant. By building the expertise of leaders and tapping into the instructional expertise of teacher leaders, schools will align professional learning and coaching to the curriculum teachers use in their classrooms. These changes will strengthen professional learning and lead to improvements in adolescent literacy.



## TEAM PROVIDES THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SUCCESS

The success of NIET's curriculum implementation support is built on nearly two decades of work in Tennessee to strengthen classroom practice and student outcomes. In 2011, NIET supported the development, piloting, and statewide rollout of the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) evaluation system. NIET trained thousands of

educators to use the TEAM rubric and thousands of leaders to observe and provide high-quality feedback to teachers.

Tennessee was one of the first states in the nation to implement a comprehensive, student outcomes-based, statewide educator evaluation system that provides frequent observation and feedback to support every teacher's growth and improvement. As a result of the high-quality feedback and coaching provided to teachers through TEAM, teachers feel better prepared to meet the needs of their students.

“NIET has shifted literacy practices across our district by using TDOE resources to create professional development tailored to our specific needs. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach; they truly work alongside you to determine where you are and where you need to go next to make the biggest impact on student success.”

**JOAHNA SIZEMORE**

**DIRECTOR OF ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION, COFFEE COUNTY SCHOOLS**





**SPOTLIGHT:**

## Clinton City Schools Recognized for Improvements in Student Performance

Clinton City Schools in Clinton, Tennessee, has partnered with NIET for the last six years to strengthen instruction. The district adopted distributed leadership best practices, including teacher leadership and the establishment of instructional leadership teams at both the school and district levels. Teachers now benefit from individualized coaching with teacher leaders and increased professional learning opportunities that align with student needs and district goals.

The partnership increased teacher effectiveness and improved student outcomes. For the 2024-2025 school year, both Clinton Elementary School and North Clinton Elementary School were designated Reward Schools by the Tennessee Department of Education for their improvements in student performance.

## Indiana Drives Improvements with Coaching and Feedback

**TENNESSEE  
TEACHERS SAY  
THEY BENEFIT FROM  
PROFESSIONAL  
EVALUATIONS**

**9  
IN  
10**

**EARLY-CAREER  
TEACHERS AGREED  
THAT TEACHER  
EVALUATION HELPS  
THEM IMPROVE  
THEIR INSTRUCTION.**

A statewide survey of teachers released by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) in the fall of 2025 demonstrated continued improvement in the effectiveness of teacher evaluations: “Over eight in 10 teachers and nine in 10 early-career teachers agreed that teacher evaluation helps them improve their teaching.”



Across **INDIANA**, teacher leadership and opportunities for teacher collaboration are strengthening classroom instruction and improving student outcomes. NIET’s partners in the state have proven the impact of a distributed leadership model

that allows teacher leaders to provide individualized coaching and feedback. State policies and philanthropic funding help to scale this work, enabling districts to provide high-quality support for both veteran and novice teachers.



# Indiana Finds Success with Strategies to Improve Instruction

In Indiana, the impact of teacher capacity building and leadership work led by NIET and district partners is creating career advancement opportunities, retaining effective educators, and supporting new teachers. NIET works with a broad range of rural, urban, suburban, public, charter, and private school systems in the state. In each case, elevating teachers into leadership roles as part of a strategic staffing and compensation system is a core strategy for success.



## INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAMS CREATE COHERENCE AND FOCUS

In NIET's partnership with Indianapolis Public Schools, the focus is on strengthening instructional leadership teams at the school and district levels. In several high schools, district and school leaders work to connect district-level priorities to systems of support in schools and classrooms. As leaders build coherence across all levels of the system, teachers are able to focus on clear goals and strategies. This comprehensive approach is helping to drive historic gains in graduation rates, which reached 93% in 2025.

At the elementary level, NIET formed a multiyear collaboration with Indianapolis Public Schools' elementary school leaders with funding from the Lilly Endowment Marion County K-12 Public Schools Initiative. The partnership provides training on high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), beginning with unit and lesson preparation and providing elementary principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and district leaders a shared foundation for strengthening instruction across campuses.

“This model has revolutionized our approach to teaching and learning and given us a laser focus on instruction. It has systematized our data collection, the professional development for our teachers, and, perhaps most important, our instructional leadership team.”

**DR. STANLEY LAW**  
PRINCIPAL,  
INDIANAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## INVESTING IN TEACHER LEADERSHIP IMPROVES COACHING FOR TEACHERS

State policies in Indiana support mentoring and coaching for new teachers. Recent revisions to the Teacher Appreciation Grant provide funding for teacher leadership and mentoring while also offering additional compensation to teachers serving in shortage areas and demonstrating instructional effectiveness. By providing districts with funding for teacher leadership roles, the state is building a powerful cadre of teacher leaders to drive improvement in their schools and help experienced and new teachers take their practice to the next level.





**SPOTLIGHT:**

## Nettle Creek Thrives with a Collaborative Culture

At Nettle Creek Schools, half of the roughly 1,000 students qualify for free and reduced lunch. The tight-knit school community, which is spread across two campuses, strives to be known for “exceptional teachers, empowered learners, and a culture of unrivaled support.” To meet this vision, Nettle Creek has partnered with NIET for the past five years.

Nettle Creek started its partnership with NIET by introducing distributed leadership through instructional leadership teams and teacher leadership positions, and by adopting the *NIET Teaching and Learning Standards*. From the beginning, district leaders have modeled being data-driven and focused on measurable goals, creating a culture of collaborative leadership.

The results of Nettle Creek’s efforts to strengthen instruction are evident. As Indiana has prioritized literacy, Nettle Creek’s proficiency on the state’s third grade IREAD assessment rose from 86% in 2024 to almost 95% in 2025. Nettle Creek leaders remain committed to the best practices that will allow them to continue raising the bar for their students and the community.

## South Carolina Focuses on Instruction to Excel

### TEACHER RETENTION CLIMBS IN NIET PARTNER SCHOOLS

# 90%

**OF TEACHERS, TEACHER LEADERS, AND SCHOOL LEADERS REPORTED THAT THEY INTEND TO REMAIN IN THEIR CURRENT SCHOOL SYSTEM OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.**

**Relevant, timely, and impactful professional learning provided by qualified teacher leaders leads to increased student achievement and increased retention of all teachers.**



**SOUTH CAROLINA** school districts partner with NIET to provide educators with career pathways and opportunities for teacher collaboration and professional learning. National studies have demonstrated the impact of this work

on student outcomes, and NIET is building on these positive results in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education by strengthening the use of state teaching and learning standards to improve observation and feedback for teachers.

# South Carolina Districts Demonstrate Significant Student Learning Outcomes

Regular evaluation of results, approach, reach, and impact allows NIET to answer the most important question: “Does it have an impact?” A research study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research found substantial impact in South Carolina, where students were four times more likely to enroll in 12th grade and graduate on time after four years in a school implementing NIET’s TAP System. For every dollar spent, researchers estimated \$14 returned in value, “making TAP a very cost-effective program.”



**14:1**  
RETURN ON INVESTMENT



## BUILDING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE

At the district level, the use of a common language around strong instruction builds consistency and clear expectations. It also supports districts in building a strong school culture of excellence. Richland One, for example, is a large, diverse district of over 21,000 students that has recently made significant gains at the high school level. The growth has been fueled by the district’s commitment to building educator capacity and supporting instruction.

The impact has been powerful. Over the last two years, C.A. Johnson High School increased achievement by 26% in English and 22% in Algebra 1, while raising its graduation rate by five points and improving College or Career Readiness by 27%. This progress moved the school up a full performance level on the state report card. Columbia High School posted similar gains, including 20% growth in Algebra 1, 38% growth in College or Career Readiness, and a two-level jump in overall state ratings. Richland One has achieved success by investing in its people and creating an environment where everyone can thrive.

“We are focused on building strong systems of support that enhance instruction and foster professional growth. Our teacher retention has steadily increased over the past three years, which speaks volumes about the strength of our collaborative and supportive environment.”

**DR. SHAWN WASHINGTON**  
PRINCIPAL,  
RICHLAND ONE



## CREATING A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR STRONG INSTRUCTION

As districts look for ways to use staff and compensation more strategically to achieve better results within existing budgets, NIET’s approach is finding traction. The core, evidence-based elements of NIET’s work drive impact on student outcomes: high-quality observation and feedback, collaborative



professional learning, instructionally focused teacher leadership roles, and performance-based compensation. These effective district strategies are increasingly reflected in state policy.

For example, NIET has played a critical role in the development and implementation of the *South Carolina Teaching Standards 4.0* rubric in K-12 districts and teacher preparation programs. Building a common language and expectations around high-quality instruction across the state creates a strong foundation for educational improvement. The implementation of high-quality instructional materials is more effective when both teachers and coaches have a shared understanding of what strong instructional practices look like in classrooms.



**NIET PARTNERS  
SEE POSITIVE  
IMPACTS ON  
STUDENT LONG-  
TERM ACADEMIC  
AND SOCIAL  
OUTCOMES**

**SPOTLIGHT:**

**Riverwalk Academy  
Celebrates Achievements**

Riverwalk Academy in the South Carolina Public Charter School District partners with NIET to implement instructional best practices. The school's instructional leadership team provides teachers with individualized coaching and professional learning tailored to teacher and student needs. Teachers collaborate frequently to share and refine instructional strategies with a proven impact on Riverwalk Academy students.

Student achievement and teacher effectiveness have increased under the guidance of Principal Erica McCray, a 2025 Milken Educator Award winner. Also in 2025, Riverwalk Academy was recognized as a Silver Award recipient by the South Carolina Department of Education for its high student growth rates. Riverwalk Academy leaders and teachers remain committed to the best practices introduced by NIET, building on success and continuously finding new ways to strengthen classroom instruction.

**14:1**

**RETURN ON INVESTMENT  
SEEN BY NIET  
PARTNER SCHOOLS**

A study of South Carolina schools across multiple NIET partner districts released by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that the longer a student experienced NIET's best practices, the greater the benefits. Students were more likely to enroll in 12th grade and graduate high school on time, in addition to long-term social and economic benefits.

**Our Team**

We confidently tackle big challenges because our amazing team has the skills and knowledge to deliver. With years of personal experience working in schools and districts to achieve results, our team members work with partners to take what they are doing to the next level. We roll up our sleeves and work alongside teachers, principals, and district and state leaders, asking questions and building capacity to support growth. We know what teachers and students are capable of, and we wake up every day excited to see them reach ambitious goals.

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