

# Preparing Aspiring Teachers to Be Effective from Day One

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Every school leader wants to ensure that all students have access to great teaching and learning experiences. And each leader knows that having an effective teacher is the most important factor in making that a reality. Yet, across the nation, a shortage of teachers threatens our ability to make this happen. At Southeastern Louisiana University, we are

tackling this shortage head-on and ensuring that our aspiring teachers enter the profession with the knowledge and skills to be effective from day one.

Southeastern Louisiana University is an institute of higher education located in the southeast corridor between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. As the third-largest university

in Louisiana, our institution has an enrollment of around 14,000 students — including those pursuing bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in our College of Education. Title II data from the 2021-22 school year showed Southeastern as the top producer of teachers in Louisiana. Southeastern has long provided a quality program for aspiring teachers. We began working with

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NIET in 2015 to train our entire faculty on the NIET *Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric*. In 2017, Southeastern decided to deepen our partnership with NIET and expand our use of NIET’s instructional rubric, embedding the indicators and domains in teacher candidates’ coursework.

Now, teacher candidates at Southeastern are exposed to all of the rubric’s indicators and domains from the outset, allowing them to gain confidence and understand what will be expected of them as teachers. Ultimately, this puts Southeastern’s graduates at an advantage when compared to fellow new teachers. While many new teachers fear principal walk-throughs or evaluations, Southeastern’s teacher candidates are comfortable with assessment.

When I was being trained as a student teacher, 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?” In our partnership

with NIET though, Southeastern now provides aspiring teachers with an approach that is truly a comprehensive system based on tangible evidence and full feedback loops — not just a tick sheet of numbers and ratings.

This comprehensive system has helped our aspiring teachers gain confidence and understand what will be expected of them as teachers, and it helps them make connections between indicators of practice on the rubric before they take on a classroom of their own. They know how to get the students to answer their own questions rather than wait to be given the answer. They just do it as second nature.

Not only does our partnership with NIET help our students, but it also strengthens the K-12 school districts that work with our aspiring teachers. Mentor teachers of yearlong residents from Southeastern gain a more holistic view of high-quality observation and evaluation processes. Teachers in these districts improve

their own instructional practices as they provide coaching and feedback to aspiring teachers using the rubric.

Our aspiring teachers are fully classroom-ready by the time they get a job and the keys to a classroom. I hear from principals that most first-year teachers will say, “Thanks for the keys. Now what do I do?” However, principals who hire Southeastern’s teachers have commented that they do not need to worry about our teachers — and that is the greatest compliment of Southeastern’s partnership with NIET.

The first year as a teacher does not have to be a trial by fire. While there will always be challenges, we can do far more to prepare and support aspiring teachers to be successful in their early years. NIET’s work with Southeastern and other teacher preparation programs is continuing to grow, and I am excited to see how the next phase of this work will advance the teaching profession. ●