Expanding Our Partnerships

UPDATES ON KEY INNOVATIONS

NIET has created and supported networks across the country to better equip educators and empower teacher leaders. These efforts are creating schools and classrooms where students and teachers are able to be successful.
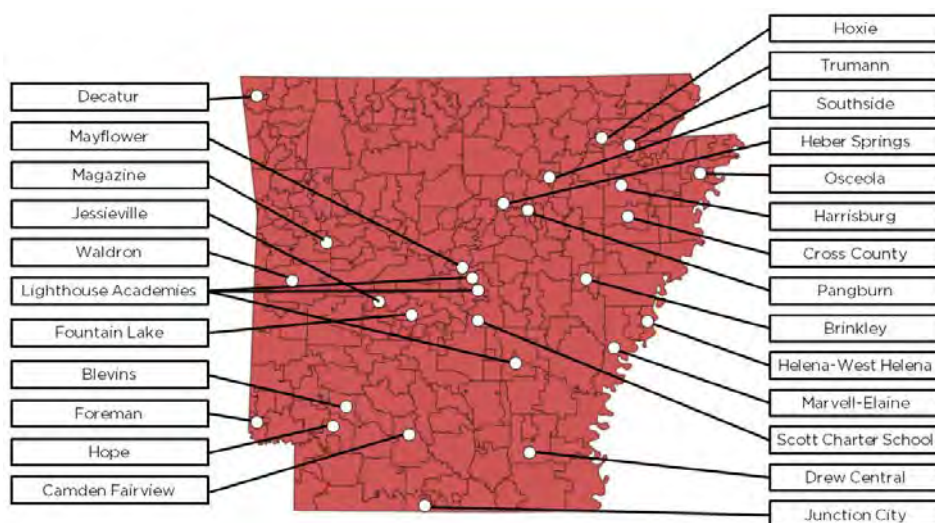
Arkansas Rural Educator Network (AREN)

NIET and the Walton Family Foundation partnered in 2020 to form the Arkansas Rural Educator Network (AREN) in order to help rural districts increase educator capacity. After a successful first year, additional leaders joined the network, and AREN now serves 23 school districts across the state.

AREN districts receive support from NIET specialists to develop a customized, district-specific plan of support, which is designed based on a strengths-based needs assessment to target support to learning recovery and acceleration, teacher leadership, principal leadership, high-quality instructional materials, and/or virtual instruction. Districts also receive on-site coaching and support, along with opportunities to collaborate with leaders across the state.

Districts in 2021-22 AREN Network

Texas Resilient Schools Support Program (RSSP)

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) launched the Resilient Schools Support Program (RSSP) in 2020 as an effort to support Texas school districts with remote instruction, ensuring leadership support that was focused on providing high-quality instruction and coaching to students and teachers. TEA approved NIET as an official technical assistance provider for the program, and in 2020-21, NIET senior specialists supported and coached leaders across four districts through self-assessments, goal setting, support cycles with targeted improvement strategies, and review meetings.

Year two of the program began in April 2021, with NIET supporting Alice ISD, Dickinson ISD, Lake Worth ISD, Pflugerville ISD, and San Felipe Del Rio CISD. The focus now is learning acceleration, and in addition to regular check-ins, NIET provides ongoing support. Both virtual and in-person support includes strategic planning, training, coaching, and data analysis in partnership with educators. Districts have shared that the partnership has helped them increase their focus on systems and structures that build teachers' capacity to grow students academically.

Texas Mentor Program Allotment (MPA)

Recognizing the need to intentionally support new teachers, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3 in June 2019, creating the Mentor Program

Allotment (MPA). MPA provides Texas districts with funds to build or sustain beginning teacher mentor programs in which experienced educators are paired with teachers who are new to their school or subject area. Funds may be used on mentor stipends, scheduled release time for mentoring activities, and mentor training.

During cycle one in 2020-21, NIET supported 17 districts and 335 mentor teachers by providing training and support to help mentor teachers provide feedback focused on ultimately improving instruction. After the training, 94 percent of mentor teachers expressed that they felt sufficiently or well prepared in understanding their roles and responsibilities as a mentor teacher. Cycle two of the MPA began in July, and NIET is supporting 12 districts and their mentor teachers through a combination of training and support, with the continued goal of ensuring that mentor teachers are equipped to coach and guide new teachers in delivering high-quality instruction to students.

Accelerating Character Education Development (ACED)

The Kern Family Foundation and NIET partnered in 2020 to support school leaders in the development of quality character education through the Accelerating Character Education Development (ACED) for School Leaders initiative. Earlier this year, we conducted a pilot with nine schools and developed a character-focused tool that accompanies the *NIET Principal Standards Rubric*. This tool, in addition to NIET training and support opportunities, is designed to

support school leaders in integrating character education and related social and emotional learning skills into instruction, school environment, and school culture. Through initial training, online resources, on-site support, and the tool itself, ACED helps school and district leaders to plan and develop sustainable character education development practices.

Initial pilot districts Algiers Charter and Tangipahoa Parish School System provided strong feedback, with 100 percent of participants saying the training was very helpful for planning the integration of character education. For the second year of the pilot, leaders in nearly 50 schools are attending training and implementing the character-focused tool. Participating schools receive a stipend and will provide feedback to NIET on the companion tool and this growing initiative.

Tennessee Rural Acceleration and Innovation Network (TRAIN)

In 2020, the Ayers Foundation, NIET, the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning and Innovation, and the Statewide Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) created a partnership — the Tennessee Rural Acceleration and Innovation Network (TRAIN) — to support Tennessee rural school districts in addressing the challenges of teaching and learning during COVID-19. This school year, TRAIN has expanded and is serving 33 school districts to increase support for students and teachers in rural and remote parts of the state, with a

targeted focus on serving the districts with the most need.

Support for each district in 2021-22 is based on a strengths-based needs assessment conducted by NIET specialists, and all professional learning aims to increase school leaders' and teachers' abilities to tailor school-wide support and instruction to meet the unique needs of their students. District leaders will continue to meet monthly in network sessions to collaborate and problem-solve throughout the school year.

Tennessee Literacy Implementation Networks (TLIN)

In March, the Tennessee Department of Education launched the Pre-K-12 Literacy Implementation Networks, part of the state's Reading 360 initiative to help boost strong reading skills for Tennessee students. Across eight regional implementation networks, 48 districts were selected to participate, with the goal of supporting the implementation of high-quality English language arts instructional materials for students over the next five years. Each region's network includes one mentor district, four to six participating districts, and a regionally selected vendor partner.

NIET was selected as the partner for the Mid-Cumberland and South Central networks and is supporting 12 Tennessee districts as they implement high-quality ELA materials. Each network taps into collaborative learning opportunities as well as virtual and on-site meetings and learning walks to workshop common problems of practice.

Districts in 2021-22 TRAIN Network