



CEO'S CORNER

A conversation with Dr. Gary Stark

As you reflect on the past year, what are some of the major developments in NIET's work? What can we look forward to over the next year?

The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) has had an historic year in the expansion of new projects and services. Equally important are district-level efforts that are prioritizing educator effectiveness as an essential component of strategic plans. Our expansion of services reflects an understanding that educator effectiveness is the key school-based lever for ensuring the academic success of our nation's students.

The model of TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement is a catalyst for systemwide

change. It creates the comprehensive structures and collaborative supports needed to develop human capital across schools, districts and states. At the same time, many districts are looking for support to make improvements in specific areas of their teacher pipeline, including recruitment, professional and leadership development. Our work this year has supported improvements for teachers all along their career pathway.

Since its launch, the TAP System has grown significantly as a comprehensive educator evaluation and support model for increasing educator effectiveness. Through the use of elements of the TAP model, we are serving more than 200,000 teachers and 2.5 million students.

This year, we are furthering the goal of the TAP System to improve instructional practices and provide stronger teaching and learning experiences for students. We have done this by focusing on the details of how classroom practices can be improved and on the specific training, structures and support that enable teachers and school leaders to drive improvement. We have also expanded our Educator Effectiveness Series with an additional phase of trainings for participating schools.

In January we rolled out a new online training portal called the Educator Effectiveness Preparation & Support System (EE PASS). This portal is a significant step forward for a comprehensive platform design. It includes new features for improved navigation and user-interfacing, updated trainings and content, improved search capabilities and greater accessibility across multiple types of devices. In addition to the video library, database management system, training modules and other content, EE PASS houses the Video Observer App, which enables observers to record and upload video clips of classroom lessons to support collaboration and feedback.

We expanded our work to support school leaders with a multiyear partnership with Texas Tech University, which will advance graduate-level principal preparation and offer a training program supported by a federal Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant. We also hope to formalize the TAP Principal Standards and evaluation tool later this spring.

We are excited to see districts and states expanding their commitment and support for the key elements we know are the foundation for teacher and school leader success, as well as student academic growth. We are also looking forward to developing new and improved resources, services and support to enable K-12 schools and districts to build their own capacity to create and sustain these elements.

What are some of the highlights of the work taking place on the ground that you have seen in school visits this year?

One of the most exciting things is seeing how various districts and leaders are using the TAP System and their partnership with NIET to address their unique needs. For example, Goshen Community Schools in Indiana works with NIET to support nine TAP schools that began implementation in the

2011-12 school year. The district was part of a consortium implementing TAP through a federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant in partnership with the Indiana Department of Education and the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning housed at the University of Indianapolis. Since the completion of their initial TIF grant, Superintendent Diane Woodworth has maintained the core of the TAP System as an essential aspect of their district plan.

Goshen's financial and structural commitment to the TAP System can be seen throughout the district. I would certainly recommend this district to anyone who wants to see an operationalized TAP culture that not only builds on, but also goes beyond the grant-funded work. District administrators routinely attend cluster meetings and ensure all aspects of TAP are implemented. Additionally, the district's master teachers collaborate across schools on field testing. This district-level commitment is reflected in the strong results of teacher effectiveness and student academic growth. If you look across Indiana, there has been substantial and sustained progress in student learning at high-need schools implementing TAP in the state. There are three times more TAP schools that have improved their letter grade compared to similar schools.

TAP schools in Indiana closed achievement gaps more rapidly than similar schools. This resulted in a five percent reduction in the achievement gap between students of color and other students. Finally, Indiana TAP schools substantially increased their retention rates, reaching over 90 percent within the last year. The improvements teachers are experiencing are impacting their decision to remain in the field of teaching.

“This year, we are furthering the goal of the TAP System to improve instructional practices and provide stronger teaching and learning experiences for students. We have done this by focusing on the details of how classroom practices can be improved, and on the specific training, structures and support that enable teachers and school leaders to drive improvement.”

DR. GARY STARK
Chief Executive Officer

This work demonstrates the sustained progress a district can achieve when placing educator effectiveness at the forefront of efforts to create transformational change. Leading our efforts to partner with districts in this work is NIET's president, Dr. Patrice Pujol. Dr. Pujol achieved remarkable success using TAP to drive academic improvement in high-need schools as superintendent of Ascension Public Schools in Louisiana. She has extensive knowledge of the design and implementation of successful reforms at the district level. We are excited by the ideas, energy and expertise she brings to our work with partners across the country.

NIET continues to be involved in state-level projects ranging from evaluation systems to coaching and online support. What has been your experience working with state departments of education, and how can state education agencies best support districts and schools in strengthening classroom instruction?

This past year NIET was selected to develop the new South Carolina Teaching Standards based on the NIET (TAP) Teaching Standards and to train educators statewide in the new standards. South Carolina decided to train higher education teacher preparation faculty first before training K-12 districts. This provided a successful rollout of the new standards. Higher education institutions introduced new teacher candidates to the standards even before districts began their training. Although we are in the early phases of this state-level launch, I am excited about the work ahead. State Superintendent Molly Spearman has a strong vision for improving instructional practice while also supporting educators every step of the way. NIET is appreciative of the partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education.

In Tennessee, this was our seventh year supporting the Department of Education in the implementation of the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model or TEAM evaluation and support system for educators. The NIET (TAP) Teaching Standards form the basis for the observation system under TEAM, and NIET was selected to train educators across the state when TEAM was introduced. We also developed an online portal for the state with resources to support evaluators and teachers using TEAM. For the last five years, we have trained and supported TEAM coaches who work statewide to provide coaching and support for districts using the model.

Over the last couple of years, we have seen how Tennessee has worked to anchor and sustain TEAM with the infrastructure and support needed to make it effective. Limited resources make this a challenge. However, districts are increasingly seeking support from TEAM coaches and working with them as partners to improve schools and support teacher and student growth.

The success of TAP across multiple states has provided valuable examples of the kinds of reforms that lead to increased educator effectiveness and student academic growth. This is particularly seen in high-need schools and districts. The work of TAP schools, and the best practices they have so successfully demonstrated, have led directly to states understanding what is desirable and achievable at the state level.

These state partnerships exemplify what is possible when state-level goals align with the work that schools are doing to improve instructional quality. In such circumstances, we see even greater opportunities for NIET to spark and support systemwide improvements in educator effectiveness best practices at the state, district and university levels.

Could you also discuss how NIET is working with higher education institutions to create stronger partnerships with K-12 districts? What will this mean for teacher candidates and their students, particularly in terms of the support new teachers will be receiving?

We work with higher education institutions in multiple ways, but first and foremost we serve as a source of educator effectiveness best practices by providing tools and materials, resources, and training services that are developed from our on-the-ground experiences with schools across the country.

In addition to our school services, we have developed several grant programs that focus on advancing educator effectiveness in teacher and principal preparation programs. Currently, we have three SEED grants. One is with Arizona State University and two are with Texas Tech University. These projects focus on incorporating best instructional practices into the curriculum, designing coursework to best meet the needs of schools, preparing teacher candidates for being assessed along the way, and in turn, training them to be reflective about their practice. Our newest SEED grant is focused on a new principal mentorship and support system that provides principal candidates

with training to be highly effective in their new role.

The partnerships include teacher and principal preparation programs and TAP districts, which allow for powerful collaboration and learning at both levels. This is particularly important to prepare and recruit effective new teachers to work in some of the highest-need schools. As many TAP schools that work with higher education partners know, being able to place student teachers in high-need schools, align their teaching experience with what they are learning in coursework and create relationships and structures in a school that will support them in their first year, lead to far greater levels of success.

With this work, we are pioneering efforts to improve educator effectiveness at the pre-service level.

As a former teacher and school administrator, I know teaching can sometimes feel like an isolated and undervalued profession. At the same time, being a teacher and an administrator gave me a lifelong passion for improving education. In my current role, I see how critically important great educators are to the success of our students, and how improving the systems that impact teachers is the most important work in education today.

Because I believe wholeheartedly that teachers are the most important factor influencing a student's academic success, I have focused my work on improving support for educators. That includes building systems and structures based on developing talent and instructional leadership, and rewarding teachers based on their hard work. The TAP System

“Because I believe wholeheartedly that teachers are the most important factor influencing a student’s academic success, I have focused my work on improving supports for educators.” DR. GARY STARK *Chief Executive Officer*

The work to improve new teacher and principal preparation is gaining momentum across the country, particularly as we see new teachers struggle as they enter the classroom. Too many of them are leaving the field of teaching within their first few years.

While efforts to better recruit talented young people into teaching are essential, it is equally imperative that they receive the kind of preparation that will enable them to be successful. We can only change the perception of teaching as a professional and rewarding career when it is actually professional and rewarding to each individual educator. We look forward to expanding our partnerships with higher education institutions and states to ensure that new teachers are prepared to hit the ground running with highly effective instructional practices.

As someone who has been involved in improving education at all levels, what advice would you give to educators both new to and experienced in TAP and its best practices that would inspire them to stay the course?

continues to provide a powerful model for building a collaborative environment rooted in reflective practice, comprehensive feedback and support for developing high-quality instructional skills. TAP also creates an environment where great teaching is recognized, valued and placed at the center of efforts to improve schools.

NIET is a national public nonprofit with a primary mission to improve educator effectiveness. Given the vision of our founder, Lowell Milken, we have been steadfast in our commitment and advancement of this work for almost two decades. With the growth of our organization and our expanding partnerships, we now have thousands of professionals focused every day on this very important issue of educator effectiveness. We are leveraging the lessons learned from the TAP System to broaden our efforts and establish a national network of highly skilled educators. Our work is creating a catalyst to improve educator effectiveness that is impacting policy in states, districts and classrooms around the country. I am proud of this collective effort and look forward to the work ahead.