

## FEATURE STORY

# Preparing for Excellence:

HOW NIET'S CONNECTIONS HAVE REVOLUTIONIZED TEACHER AND LEADER PREPARATION

NIET's work to equip educators for excellence starts before they ever enter a classroom of their own.

Through its 20 years of work to define great teaching via the NIET Teaching Standards Rubric and its extensive K-12 partnerships, NIET has been uniquely positioned to support how educators are prepared for the classroom. In working with school districts to develop stronger support systems for teachers, many educators and school leaders articulated the challenge of the gap between how they were prepared to teach and the actual demands they faced in the classroom. Districts wanted to know where they could hire educators who understood the expectations of NIET's rubric on day one.

In response, NIET began to work with district partners to build stronger connections to the teacher preparation programs supplying most of their new teachers. Strengthening the partnership between districts and teacher preparation programs has had a number of benefits:



Instructional skills that districts expected of classroom teachers can be integrated into the preparation program's clinical experiences and course work.



Teacher candidates can be placed in high-need schools for their clinical experience, learning alongside experienced mentors.



Teacher candidates with experience at a high-need school may be more likely to choose to work there.



High-need schools can get a first-hand look at potential new hires in action, better informing their hiring strategies.



Teacher candidates training in NIET and ASU's STEM-based partnership were given training in related content areas as part of their educator preparation.



My principal couldn't believe I was a first-year teacher. My exposure to the NIET rubric in my coursework at ASU and in my student teaching experience at a partnering school put me head-and-shoulders ahead of expectations. I looked at the evaluation rubric before my first observation and thought, **'I've got this.'**

**Loralle Haynes**

Second grade teacher at Collier Elementary School,  
Littleton Elementary School District in Phoenix, Arizona

Creating – and sustaining – this bridge between school districts and higher education institutions has ultimately led to stronger educator preparation programs that better prepare new teachers for the challenges and opportunities they will face in their district and classroom, and it has also allowed districts to grow their own workforce. “Teacher candidates know about teaching, they know how to plan a lesson, they know how to assess student learning and they can manage student behavior,” said D. Gale Stocks, a site coordinator at Texas Tech’s TechTeach Program. *“Our teacher candidates come out more like a second-year teacher than a first-year teacher. If that’s not a revolution in education, what is?”*

NIET has worked with over 75 universities nationwide to help prepare aspiring teachers to be successful as new classroom teachers, particularly in working with high-need students. Across these partnerships, NIET helps educator preparation programs embed and align research-based, effective principles into coursework and clinical practices. While this work is now embedded in NIET’s approach, it was two innovative partnerships in 2013 that began to fully unpack what is possible in educator preparation.

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## THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX TO ADDRESS CRITICAL NEEDS

*In 2013, two federal grants helped to propel NIET's work at two universities: Texas Tech University (TTU) and Arizona State University (ASU). The grants, funded through the Supporting Effective Educator Development or SEED program, each addressed a particular challenge in teacher preparation. The partnership with TTU was focused on teacher shortages in rural areas, while the ASU project was designed to address the shortage of teachers with STEM expertise in high-need schools.*

### Texas Tech University – TAP Connect

Rural school districts in Texas have faced significant teacher shortages. Not only do districts struggle to recruit new teachers, but they also find it increasingly difficult to retain their most effective educators as they compete with urban districts offering higher salaries. The challenge in Texas is heightened given the rapidly growing need for teachers who can work with English Learner students.

A partnership between TTU and rural K-12 districts – facilitated by NIET – has taken a new approach to teacher training. One of the most innovative components of the partnership is a “grow-your-own” model. High school graduates who go on to earn an associate’s degree can then be recruited by their local school district to be part of a unique 2 years + 1 year preparation program. Teacher candidates are provided with a full year of intensive teacher preparation combined with classroom

experience, resulting in a Bachelor of Science degree and teaching certification. This model has allowed districts to develop a teaching workforce that is embedded in the student communities they serve. Among candidates graduating from the program, 96% obtained a teaching position within one year of graduation and 94% of those are teaching in Title I schools.

In addition to strengthening the preparation of teacher candidates, the inclusion of NIET in the partnership has enabled schools to create leadership roles for experienced teachers, further developing the instructional capacity of the faculty to support new teachers as they take on their own classroom. Advanced certification through TTU provides teacher leaders with training in literacy, STEM, and leadership – enabling them to support teachers through job-embedded, school-based professional learning. *Continued Next Page*



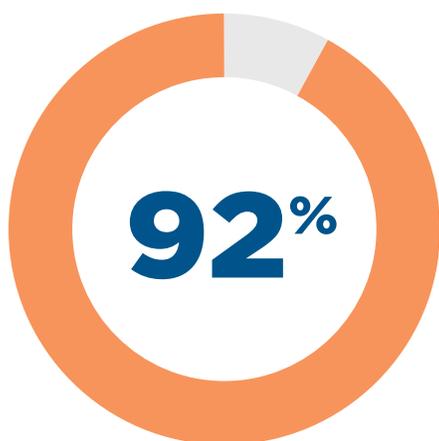
*Corey Atkins started in Texas Tech's LIFT program when he was teaching in Grand Prairie ISD as a way to grow his leadership abilities. He now serves as an assistant principal at Maple Lawn Elementary School in Dallas ISD.*



Texas Tech University Instructor Michael Richardson contributes feedback during an educator preparation convening with NIET staff, K-12 leaders, and higher education personnel.

## TTU-SEED GRADUATES

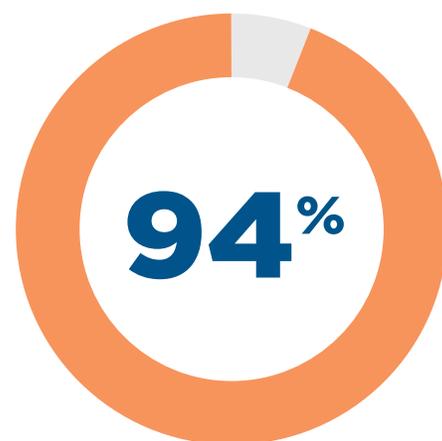
The majority of TTU-SEED graduates serve in high-need schools



GRADUATED



GRADUATES OBTAINED  
A TEACHING POSITION  
WITHIN ONE YEAR  
OF GRADUATION



GRADUATES SERVED  
IN HIGH-NEED  
SCHOOLS WITHIN ONE  
YEAR OF GRADUATION

## Arizona State University – Planting the SEED

*Arizona's high-need schools, like many in the nation, have struggled to recruit and retain effective STEM teachers.*

ASU and NIET approached the challenge by pairing intensive classroom preparation with quality training in STEM subjects, in part through partnering with ASU's Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering, and placing these new STEM teachers in high-need districts and schools, where they were paired with a strong mentor teacher. ASU and NIET also worked together to design support structures in each school to help retain STEM teachers as well as provide opportunities for professional growth and advancement into leadership roles. The innovative practices pioneered through this partnership have been integrated into both clinical practice and coursework in ASU's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College.

On average, ASU teacher candidates performed above expectations by graduation and were ready to enter the classroom. The partnership's strategic approach to recruitment, training, and placement has proved highly effective.

## THE NEXT STEP: DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERS

NIET's partnerships highlighted another area for improvement in educator preparation. Great school leaders are essential to student success, but too often, principal preparation has been lacking, with few on-the-ground training experiences.

In 2015, NIET and TTU created an innovative competency-based fellowship for principal candidates in high-need school districts across Texas and Louisiana. The 15-month

program offers future school leaders hands-on experience in navigating the daily tasks and challenges of school leadership in collaboration with highly skilled veteran leaders and university preparation. After completing a rigorous selection process, principal fellows are placed in schools to serve as an interim assistant principal during the yearlong, job-embedded clinical experience. During this time, fellows take TTU courses that are aligned to key components of success, including data-driven decision-making, instructional leadership, and human capital development. Each fellow is mentored by a high-quality principal coach and a university coach, and the principal is also given feedback and opportunities for growth over the course of the placement.

The program has shown that it successfully recruits high-quality principal candidates and improves their leadership and coaching skills, with 80% serving in a high-need school within one year of graduating. The familiarity with the on-the-ground situations better prepares the fellows to be effective from day one after their training is over.

"The principal fellows program has grown my leadership skills," says Amanda Rodriguez, a former principal fellow and current principal at Juan Seguin Elementary School, a Grand Prairie Independent School District school. "I am now able to go right to a teacher's classroom, sit, observe, watch the interaction of that adult with those students, and ...coach that teacher into her understanding of where she's at, where her students are at, and what she needs to do to grow them and get them to where they need to be."

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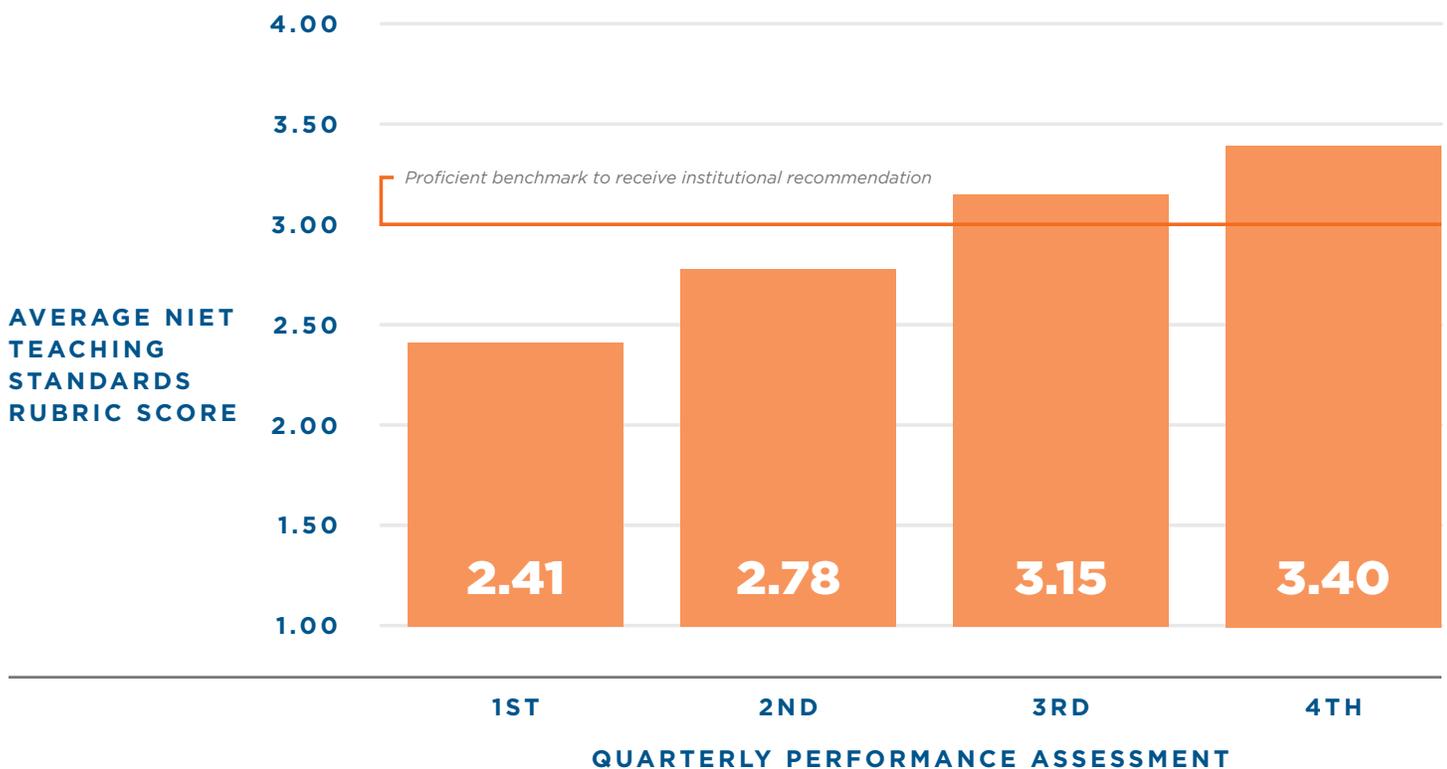
*When ASU teacher candidates are placed at NIET partner schools like Copper Trails Middle School, where the rubric is already in place, their transition to a classroom of their own is seamless. Student teachers become comfortable with the rubric and can practice delivering high-quality instruction during long-term residencies, where they are mentored by educators who have the same expectations for great teaching and learning.*



Dr. Ken Britt, senior vice president and dean of the educators college at Marian University in Indianapolis shares ideas with Dr. Candice McQueen and higher education leaders during a feedback session hosted by NIET.

## ASU-SEED TEACHER CANDIDATES

improve instructional skills over time.





A student teacher from South Carolina State University leads a class of students at Dover Elementary School in Orangeburg, South Carolina.

## SHARING AND SCALING INNOVATIVE PRACTICES WITH UNIVERSITY PARTNERS

A 2019 federal Teacher Quality Partnership grant is supporting an innovative partnership between NIET, a group of Indiana school districts, and Marian University's Klipsch Educators College. The partnership will build on The Marian Promise, a year-long program with a focus on addressing key shortage areas at the elementary and secondary levels including special education, English language learning, and STEM subjects.

Students participating in The Marian Promise will complete the program with a Master of Education (M.Ed.) and teacher certification, and with an enhanced concentration in these key shortage areas. District partners are highly interested in building the STEM capabilities of elementary

teachers and recruiting candidates with a degree in a STEM subject at the secondary level to best prepare their students for the 21st Century workforce.

Aspiring teachers with a major in a STEM subject, or other high-need subject area, learn alongside mentor teachers in a high-need school through a teacher residency. The partnership with NIET will create a new teacher induction program in the partnering school districts, strengthening their efforts to recruit and retain effective teachers in high-need subject areas. Through this program, new teachers and their mentors will be supported to strengthen instructional practice, establishing an induction model for new teachers in each of the districts. ***Continued Next Page***



## UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS PROVIDE KEYS TO THE CLASSROOM

The innovative work funded through grants is being shared and brought to greater scale through work with a growing number of higher education partnerships. With support from NIET, institutions like Southeastern Louisiana University are continuing to build on this work and continuously improve the preparation of teacher candidates. In 2017, Southeastern decided to expand its use of NIET's instructional rubric, embedding the indicators and domains in teacher candidates' coursework. This has helped teacher candidates gain confidence and understand what will be expected of them as teachers, and it helps them make connections across the rubric before they take on a classroom of their own.

Dr. Paula Summers Calderon, dean of Southeastern Louisiana University's College of Education, summarized the difference this can make: "NIET's approach truly is a comprehensive system based on tangible evidence and full feedback loops - not just a tick sheet of numbers and ratings."

The first year as a teacher or principal does not have to be a trial by fire. While there will always be challenges, we can do far more to prepare and support new teachers and principals to be successful in their early years. NIET's work with higher education is continuing to grow, and the next phase of this work will expand on these innovations. ●

