

# The Power of a Long-term Commitment to Effective Teaching

DESOTO PARISH SCHOOLS, LOUISIANA

The District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness honors school districts that have focused on supporting excellent instruction and improving student performance. The 2019-20 year marked the second time that NIET has given the recognition and \$50,000 award.

## What Sets DeSoto Apart

DeSoto's longstanding commitment to instructional excellence, across several leadership transitions, shows the power of an investment in human capital and dedication to maintaining that focus. DeSoto Parish Schools, located in northwest Louisiana, has more than 5,000 students across 10 schools, and about 60% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. In 2008, DeSoto recommitted to increasing teacher quality by partnering with NIET to implement the TAP System. At the time, student success was lagging. The district's graduation rate in 2008-09 was 67.8%, and in 2010 the district was ranked No. 45 in the state. As in many districts, educators said that there was unproductive intra-district competition and teaching was often happening in isolation.

The DeSoto-NIET partnership has placed teacher leaders at the forefront of improvement. Teacher leaders are coached and supported in their use of evidence-based tools and strategies that strengthen instructional practice. Now, teacher leaders are responsible for leading their peers through professional learning, and everyone in the district, from the leadership team to the students themselves, is responsible for monitoring and increasing growth and success. As a result, DeSoto has



**Our partnership with NIET really engages teachers in a highly collaborative, professional yet competitive environment that promotes educator effectiveness. Everything we do revolves around outcomes for students and opportunities to improve for teachers.**

*Clay Corley, superintendent for DeSoto Parish Schools*

seen noticeable increases in student achievement. Among the highlights:

- In 2016, DeSoto earned its **first-ever "A" rating** from the state.
- In 2019, its **graduation rate was 92.9%** — well above state and national averages.
- On the district performance scores released in 2019, DeSoto ranked **No. 12 overall in the state.**
- On the 2019 LEAP test, DeSoto Parish was in the **top 10 most improved school systems** in the state across all grades and subjects.

DeSoto's transformation demonstrates the power of high-quality teaching practices and how a true commitment to excellent teaching can overcome barriers. Throughout the past several months, DeSoto has also shown the power of having strong systems like these in place. Leaders have navigated COVID-19 through leveraging strong communication channels and using networks of teacher and school leaders to provide training and coaching. While their continuous growth mindset is looking toward the next step they can take, they have been able to move forward together and keep the focus on student learning.