

FEATURE STORY

Putting Best Practices into Policy

From its inception, NIET's work has been to understand and promote the conditions that are necessary for great teaching and learning to thrive. This is naturally of interest to leaders and policymakers, who bear responsibility for ensuring our education system serves all students. Through its two decades of work across states and districts, NIET has provided many valuable and innovative lessons that have informed policies at the federal and state levels that are designed to better support teachers and student learning. Here is a look back on how the principles of NIET's work and the successes of partner districts and states have led to noteworthy policy advancements.



Arizona Desert Elementary School, Gadsden Elementary School District, San Luiz, Arizona



Federal Investment in Comprehensive School Reform

In the wake of *No Child Left Behind*, which expanded school accountability to every state, congressional lawmakers became interested in innovative ways to accelerate teacher development in order to help schools meet ambitious student achievement goals. The TAP System, a comprehensive approach to build educator excellence and increase student achievement, was one program that caught the eye of congressional lawmakers.

TAP's foundation in using research-based practices to create systems and capacity for continuous school improvement was key to policymakers. As a result, the core elements of TAP - which include multiple career pathways, ongoing professional development, aligned feedback and support for teachers, and performance-based compensation - became one of the primary influences for a new federal grant program: the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF).

Since its establishment in 2006, the TIF program, now known as the Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program, has funded 131 projects that serve over 2,000 schools in more than 300 urban, suburban, and rural school districts in 36 states. Just like NIET's work, the federal grant program remains focused on the research-based best practices for improving teacher effectiveness. TSL provides funding to develop performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need

schools that take into account student achievement gains and classroom evaluations. These grants also support human capital strategies, such as teacher career pathways that recognize, develop, and reward excellent teachers as they advance through various stages of their professional journey.

NIET has received numerous grants through the TIF and TSL programs that have made profound effects on its partner districts. The funds allowed for the creation of an infrastructure for professional learning and rewarded effective educators. These grants also provided NIET with opportunities to explore how to better support great teaching through teacher-led coaching and professional development.

Redefining Professional Development

Many of the lessons learned through NIET's TIF grants played a pivotal role in informing the development of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was signed into law in 2015. The law includes an updated definition of professional development, shifting the concept of professional development from one-off workshops to activities that "are sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused." This definition provides a strong guide to schools on how to best structure professional learning in a way that truly facilitates teacher growth. *Continued Next Page*



Formalizing these roles and having teacher leaders in every building has been the fuel to get things done.”

Ryan Wise
Director | Iowa Department of Education



Leaders at the national and state level have taken notice of NIET's work, and principles are now in place throughout various grant programs, policies, and initiatives. Superintendent Pat Mapes (speaking) shared about how Perry Township has benefited from teacher leadership programs, which caught the attention of state Representative Bob Behning (left), who then advanced legislation in Indiana to further career opportunities for teachers.

IMPACT ON STATE POLICY

Compensation for Teacher Leadership and Teacher Performance

NIET believes that exceptional teachers should be rewarded for their expertise and ability to impact student learning. Great teachers also deserve career advancement opportunities that allow them to use their instructional expertise and earn additional compensation for taking on additional responsibilities. These principles of NIET's work have informed important state-led efforts to help ensure that excellent teachers are paid for their skills and accomplishments.

Enacted in 2014-15, the Iowa Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) System is a landmark policy that solidified the state as a national leader on teacher leadership. The Iowa TLC System provides \$163 million in annual funds to help districts reward effective teachers with leadership opportunities and higher pay, attract promising new teachers with competitive starting salaries and more support, and foster greater collaboration so teachers can learn from each other.

As the new state system was under development, a TIF grant allowed NIET to work closely with Saydel and Central Decatur community school districts to provide a powerful, on-the-ground example of teacher leadership and compensation reform for others in Iowa. In particular, the grant demonstrated how rural schools could use teacher leaders to provide rich professional development and coaching to their peers, reducing the need to rely on a limited supply of external professional development providers.

More recently, Texas and Indiana have launched grant programs to support teacher leader roles, informed by NIET's track record of success in each state. In 2018, the Texas Education Agency announced a Teacher Leadership Grant program that offered up to \$4 million to create instructional teacher leadership roles at schools identified for improvement. In 2019, the Indiana State Legislature passed H.B. 1008, which authorized \$3.5 million in funding over two years for districts to implement career ladder programs. ***Continued Next Page***



Frameworks to Support Instructional Improvement

What is good teaching? How do you foster good teaching at scale?

These are two fundamental questions states must answer if they want to nurture teacher growth in every school. In

the past decade, NIET has helped states answer these questions through the development and adoption of statewide frameworks for teaching. The NIET Teaching Standards Rubric, a set of holistic teaching standards that outlines expectations for teachers across various indicators, is currently in use in eight states.

Four states have adopted NIET's rubric in whole or in part based on the results of schools that implemented the TAP System through a federal Teacher Incentive Grant. In 2011, Tennessee launched a new system for teacher evaluation and support based on NIET's rubric, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM). NIET supported the state by providing in-depth training and certification for tens of thousands of educators statewide over the summer of 2011, as well as offering an online portal for annual evaluator certification and video-based resources for teachers. NIET has since provided ongoing support to the state-level TEAM coaches serving school districts across the state.

In 2014, Texas piloted NIET's TAP System for teacher classroom observation in 50 school districts. Based on

the success of the pilot, the state contracted with NIET to help design the teacher observation and feedback portion of its revamped evaluation system, T-TESS (Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System). NIET also supported the state in building an online portal to house teacher evaluation data and resources.

South Carolina adapted, and then adopted, NIET's rubric as the South Carolina Teaching Standards 4.0 in 2018. As the state prepared to roll it out to all schools in the state, NIET provided training on the teaching standards to both districts and educator preparation programs to ensure alignment between teacher candidates' preparation experience and districts' expectations for quality instruction.

And just last year in 2019, Iowa adopted the NIET Teaching Standards as its statewide instructional framework. NIET has since provided training for schools and higher education institutions across the state on how to effectively use the rubric to improve teaching and learning. Through a set of teaching standards, teachers share a common language for great instruction and have a clear vision of excellent teaching that moves student achievement.

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More than 130 districts leaders, university faculty, classroom teachers, and academic coaches all gathered together in Ottumwa, Iowa, for statewide trainings on the Iowa Instructional Framework in January 2020.

Initiatives to Support New Teachers

The first years of a teacher's career are perhaps the most critical to his or her professional development. In many schools supported by NIET, new teachers are provided intensive support systems and professional learning opportunities that help them develop into more effective teachers.

Since 2014, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) has awarded over \$9 million in grants to teacher preparation providers and their school system partners to advance a shift to full-year residencies for all aspiring teachers. By 2020, Louisiana will have established a cadre of 2,500 trained mentor teachers that support yearlong residents. Based on NIET's track record of success in the state, BESE cited NIET as "a partner with proven experience" that could help districts train and implement mentor teacher roles. ●

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITY

Twenty years ago, these conditions and opportunities were exceedingly rare in the average American school. Today, however, there are many districts and states that have made professional development a priority and advanced teacher leadership opportunities. The fact that these principles are reflected in federal and state policies is a promising sign that schools across our nation are increasingly providing teachers with the support necessary to grow their practices and help them impact student

achievement. These policies, combined with NIET's work over the years, have helped schools make strides toward the goal of ensuring every student has access to a teacher capable of providing an excellent and equitable education. While there is far more work to be done to reach this goal, the path forward is clearer than ever: If we invest in teacher leadership and meaningful professional development, educators - and their students - will thrive. ●



Alice Harte Charter School, InspireNOLA, New Orleans, Louisiana



Southport Elementary; Perry Township Schools; Indianapolis, Indiana

**NIET KNOWS THAT
TEACHERS LEARN AND GROW BEST**

when they are provided coaching and professional learning opportunities. Through peer teacher leaders, career advancement opportunities, and performance incentives, educators can feel acknowledged and rewarded for great teaching.