



Ready at the Gate:

How NIET's Higher Education Partnerships Are Preparing Teachers for the Classroom

Over the last several years, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) has partnered with a wide range of teacher preparation programs—and the school districts that hire program graduates—to develop approaches that result in new teachers who are well-prepared to succeed, particularly in high-need schools. A key goal is to develop teacher candidates who can step into classrooms and who are more prepared to be effective on day one. Achieving this goal requires strong preparation in instructional skills, the opportunity for significant practice in a real classroom and meaningful feedback. Equally important is the development of structures and approaches in schools and districts that provide new teachers with the resources and support they need to grow and succeed over time. And ultimately, there needs to be greater understanding and communication between the faculty of teacher preparation programs and the K–12 school district leaders hiring new teachers.

Training Education Faculty in Tennessee

In Tennessee, the adoption of a new statewide teacher evaluation system called TEAM (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model)—which uses the TAP Teaching Standards or rubric as the basis for classroom observations—created an interest among teacher preparation program faculty in evaluator training and certification. In the summer prior to the new system being implemented, NIET trained more than 5,000 evaluators. Many higher education faculty participated in these trainings and subsequent trainings on the TEAM rubric. As they delved deeper, they began to look at ways to redesign their coursework to better prepare teacher candidates to be successful in the classroom and on the evaluation system. Middle Tennessee State University, for example, sent faculty members to NIET trainings on the rubric, where they took advantage of sessions on coaching, field testing student strategies, developing teacher leaders, and supporting school-based systems for professional development and support.

Planting the “SEED” of Teaching Growth in Texas and Arizona

TEXAS

In 2012, NIET expanded its work with teacher preparation programs through two new federal Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grants in partnership with Texas Tech University (TTU) and Arizona State University (ASU). Under the leadership of College of Education Dean Dr. Scott Ridley, Texas Tech partnered with NIET and five high-need districts on an initiative called TAP Connect to implement the TAP System in schools, help teacher preparation faculty to redesign coursework to ensure students are well-prepared to be successful on the TAP evaluation rubric in place in these districts, and create a pipeline of new “TAP-ready” teachers. The districts are New Caney ISD, Frenship ISD, Grand Prairie ISD, Roosevelt ISD and Slaton ISD.

Everyone wins.

- High-need districts receive well-trained student teachers who are placed in classrooms for a full year, creating additional support for students and providing the district with an early look at potential hires.
- Teachers and school leaders reap the benefits of the TAP System’s robust professional development, regular feedback, and coaching and mentoring facilitated by qualified teacher leaders.
- TTU faculty are learning valuable lessons that are helping them more closely align their curriculum to the needs of schools and students that their teacher candidates will serve.
- NIET is learning how teacher preparation

partnerships can improve recruitment of effective candidates to high-need schools and support teacher leadership development.

- TTU teacher graduates in TAP Connect are well-prepared to be successful new teachers, placed in TAP campuses with built-in systems to support continued growth, and supported in choosing to work with high-need students in high-need schools.

“We’re moving from teacher-centered to student-centered; from an activity to thinking. And we’ve got folks thinking all on the same page and moving in the same direction. It’s pretty powerful,” said Fernando Valle, assistant professor in the educational leadership program at Texas Tech University. “At the end of the day, the students are benefiting.”

In addition to the daily support the TAP teachers receive in the classroom, they have the opportunity to enhance their skills by earning advanced certification in leadership, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) or literacy at TTU.

Literacy certification candidate Stacy Reavis, an ESL (English as a Second Language) career teacher at Westwind Elementary School in Frenship ISD, is seeing that the lessons from her coursework and teaching practice are “integrating beautifully.” The experience is “adding layer upon layer” of coaching and refinement, she said, that take her teaching to the next level. After 27 years of teaching, Reavis is refreshed with new takeaways that are embedded in her daily practice.

“Training for the TTU literacy certification through





“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?”

D. GALE STOCKS

TAP Connect has amplified my TAP learning one-thousand-fold,” Reavis said. “The collaboration with my classmates and with my colleagues is wonderful.”

University faculty are also using the training conducted in schools to collaborate with peers on strengthening their own instruction, integrating elements of the TAP teaching standards into their classrooms.

D. Gale Stocks, site coordinator for TechTeach—TTU’s teacher education program—sees the effects of this training firsthand. She noted that the real-world skills teachers across the TechTeach program are learning give them an advantage in coming to schools “ready to go.”

“They know about teaching, they know how to plan a lesson, they know how to assess student learning and they can manage student behavior,” she said. “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?”

TTU teacher candidates are recognizing the difference. They report that they are highly appreciative of hands-on practice with the support of teacher leaders, are performing better in the classroom, and are coming to expect that learning and growth and teamwork are fundamental to being a teacher. Many note that they will always seek to teach in a school with these commitments in place.

ARIZONA

Arizona State University (ASU) partnered with NIET and five high-need districts in Arizona on a federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant to begin the process of integrating effective teaching practices as described in the TAP rubric into coursework and practicum. The TAP SEED districts are the Gadsden Elementary School District, Glendale Elementary School District, Littleton Elementary School District, Mesa Public Schools and Osborn School District No. 8.

ASU already had a year-long student teaching requirement for candidates in iTeachAZ—the university’s teacher preparation program. What changed with the TIF partnership was the connection of teacher candidates to high-need districts implementing TAP.

Student teachers now had the opportunity to be placed in schools with TAP Leadership Teams, cluster groups, multiple observations and coaching. They received ongoing support from teacher leaders to improve their practice. They improved rapidly, and developed strong ties that have led them to continue to teach in these

high-need schools, rather than move to less demanding schools with higher-socioeconomic-status students.

According to Nancy Perry, assistant dean of clinical experiences at ASU's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, the incorporation of TAP System principles has improved the faculty's approach as a whole, both in how they have delivered instruction to teacher candidates and how they have enriched the student-teacher experiences of the candidates.

"With the TAP System, we have a common language," Perry said. "We have all become on the same page about what good teaching looks like. We went through observations, pre- and post-conferences, and all began to grow together."

All faculty are trained and certified on the rubric. (ASU uses eight of the 19 rubric indicators for teacher candidates, but faculty are trained on all of them.) Teacher candidates must be rated as proficient on the rubric before they graduate.

In the Osborn school district, 37 percent of its classroom teachers are iTeachAZ graduates and 46 percent make up TAP Leadership Teams of mentor and master teachers.

"Do you know when you ask teachers what they like about teaching, and they go, 'Oh, that 'aha!' moment with children?'" said Osborn superintendent Patricia Tate. "I see that with teachers."

"TAP has an amazing impact on the Osborn district," Tate continued. "We are a 'B' district in the labeling system in Arizona surrounded by 'C's'. Clearly our iTeach graduates are being prepared at an incredibly powerful level."

Building on this work, NIET partnered with Northern Arizona University's College of Education in 2015 to strengthen preparation and certification practices for pre-service teachers so that they can become highly effective teachers upon entering the classroom.

Supporting Teacher Preparation Programs in Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, NIET forged a partnership in 2014 with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) to develop a new teacher performance assessment (TPA) for teacher candidates. NIET is also working with teacher preparation programs to align their coursework and clinical experience to new state standards and the new TPA, and developing online resources and tools to support this work.

Massachusetts has more than 70 sponsoring organizations offering a range of teacher preparation options at public and private universities, alternative certification programs, residency programs and district-led programs. The Department decided to develop a new teacher candidate performance assessment that is aligned to the Massachusetts evaluation framework for in-service teachers. The TPA will enable teacher preparation programs to better assess their graduates' expected success in the classroom and move to more easily identify areas for reinforcement or refinement in their preparation programs.

To support organizations in Massachusetts, NIET has reached out to TTU College of Education Dean Scott Ridley and members of his team to offer their hands-on experience with aligning coursework and clinical practicum to new standards and assessments. The Texas Tech team is viewed as a leading innovator in developing experiences and supports necessary to ensure that teacher candidates are prepared to be successful in their first year of teaching, including in high-need classrooms.

"These innovative partnerships are not only ensuring that the next generation of teachers is well-prepared to meet the challenges of the future," said Dr. Gary Stark, president and CEO of NIET, "but they are also creating a culture of collaboration, reflection and continuous improvement that all schools need and deserve."