

NIET

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING



NIET Research Summary

Examining the Evidence and Impact of NIET's Initiatives

2023-24

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Executive Summary

The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's (NIET) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Knowing that teacher quality is the single biggest in-school factor for student success, NIET's mission is to build educator excellence to give all students the opportunity for success. NIET's vision is that every student in America is taught by an excellent teacher and supported by effective leaders every year—and that has been the foundation of NIET's work for the past two decades. NIET believes intentional, sustained, and high-quality investments in educators directly result in success for all students and are essential to eliminating equity gaps. NIET has optimism about what every teacher and student is capable of and sees them rising to new levels of success every day. As a result, NIET is committed to raising achievement levels for all students by focusing on the most powerful lever for change: teachers and the leadership that supports them.

For more than 20 years, NIET has provided support to states, districts, schools, and universities in recruiting, developing, supporting, and retaining educators in order to raise achievement levels for all students. Researchers at NIET and elsewhere have studied the effectiveness of NIET's initiatives. This document describes some of the most recent results that have emerged from that research.

The first section of the 2023-24 NIET Research Summary presents highlights from five recent studies that align with specific services offered by NIET:

1. The Long Run Impacts of the TAP System on Student Outcomes in South Carolina
2. Elevating Teacher Effectiveness for Students in Rural Arkansas
3. Accelerating Character Education Development
4. Building Educator Capacity in Rural Communities
5. NIET Aspiring Teacher Rubric: A Valid and Reliable Tool to Measure Aspiring Teacher Instruction

The subsequent section outlines findings from a comprehensive examination of NIET partnerships conducted over the past five years, illustrating the impact of NIET's services on student performance, teacher retention and effectiveness, principal development, and educator preparation.

NIET's initiatives excel with over two decades of success in elevating student achievement in high-need schools. As of the 2023-24 school year, NIET initiatives are impacting over 300,000 educators and more than 3 million students across 25 states. The findings presented in this document underscore our positive impact, emphasizing the crucial role of (1) the TAP System in fostering a challenging, rewarding, and collegial environment; (2) customized training and coaching to support specific needs for educators; and (3) a valid and reliable instrument to measure aspiring teacher instruction. These approaches ultimately enhance educator effectiveness and improve student outcomes.

Results from Recent Studies of NIET's Impact

The TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement

This section provides summaries of two studies on the impact of the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement in South Carolina and Arkansas.

The Long Run Impacts of the TAP System on Student Outcomes in South Carolina

In the spring of 2023, Cohodes and colleagues released [a study](#) on the National Bureau of Economic Research website, investigating implementation of the TAP System in South Carolina schools across multiple districts and years. The study demonstrates that performance compensation for teachers led to improved student outcomes when combined with ongoing support and coaching.

The study sample consisted of first-time eighth grade students from the 2002-03 to the 2012-13 school years (21 TAP System schools). Comparison schools were identified using propensity score matching to find a group similar to the high-need schools that made up the TAP System group (10 comparison schools). The long-term outcome measures were 12th grade enrollment status, on-time high school graduation, arrests as adolescents or early adults (ages 17 and 18), and participation in economic assistance programs between ages 18 and 22.

Finding 1: Improvement in student academic and social outcomes

The authors found that exposure to the TAP System in eighth grade increased the likelihood of enrollment in 12th grade and increased the likelihood of on-time high school graduation. Positive social benefits resulting from eighth-grade exposure to the TAP System included reduced felony rates in adolescence and early adulthood and less reliance on social welfare programs in adulthood.

Finding 2: The positive outcomes increase with greater exposure to the TAP System

Furthermore, the longer a student was exposed to the TAP System, the greater the benefits. For example, the increased likelihood of 12th grade enrollment almost quadrupled from an increase of 2.1 percentage points after one year of exposure to an increase of 7.7 points after four years of exposure.

Finding 3: The TAP System is cost effective

In a cost-benefit analysis, the authors estimated benefits outweigh the cost of the TAP System by \$14 to \$1. The authors noted that, "Our findings suggest that a comprehensive pay scheme, embedded with observations of teaching practices and a feedback mechanism, can deliver desired student outcomes in a cost-effective way." (p. 5)

In summary, the study shows that exposure to the TAP System cost-effectively improves long-term educational attainment and reduces criminal activity and government assistance reliance in early adulthood. More information on this study can be found [here](#).

Elevating Teacher Effectiveness for Student Success in Rural Arkansas

Many school districts serving rural communities struggle to attract, develop and keep effective teachers (DeFeo et al., 2017; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Latterman & Steffes, 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016, Ulferts, 2016). Insufficient pay, poor collegiality, lack of leadership support, and poor school culture and morale have been found as some of the major factors driving teachers away (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

In the fall of 2016, Cross County School District in Cherry Valley, Arkansas, partnered with NIET through a Teacher Incentive Fund grant to raise educator excellence and student achievement by enhancing their implementation of the TAP System. Previous reports have summarized the results of this partnership through [the third year](#) and [the fifth year](#) of the grant. The findings below highlight teacher and student outcomes through the final year of the grant.

Finding 1: High percentage of effective teachers retained

Cross County School District worked to retain a high percentage of effective teachers year to year. At the beginning of the grant, the district successfully retained over 80% of effective teachers, and this figure increased to 92% by the final year.

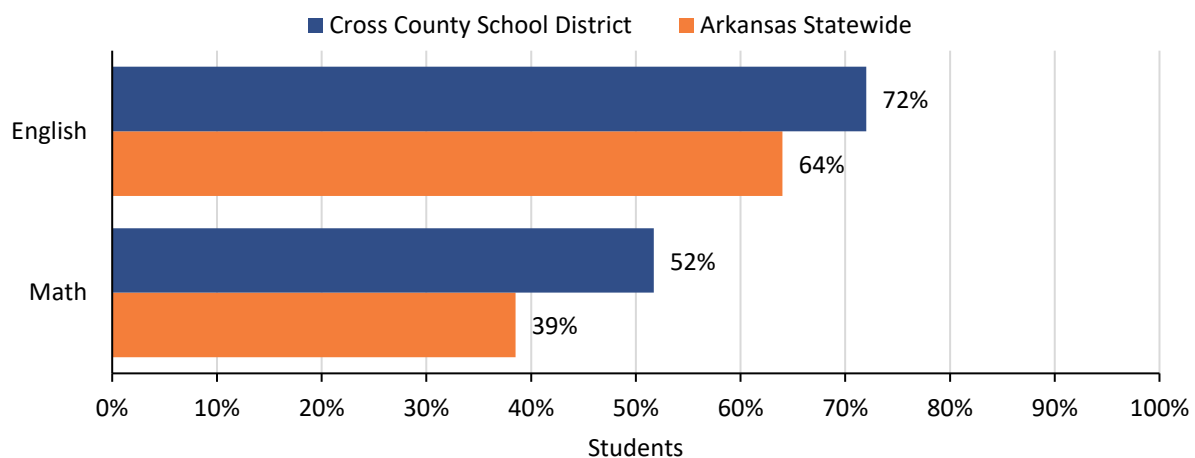
Finding 2: High percentage of effective teachers

As most retained teachers were already proficient in instructional practices, teacher leaders prioritized supporting new teachers. This support led to many of those new teachers becoming effective and contributed to a substantial increase in the percentage of effective teachers, approaching 100% by the grant's final year.

Finding 3: Improvement in student performance

As the district retained and enhanced the effectiveness of its teachers, student performance surpassed statewide levels. In the grant's final year (2021-22), Cross County School District outperformed the state by 8 and 13 percentage points in English and math, respectively (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The percentage of students passing the Arkansas state assessments in 2021-22.



In the fall of 2023, Cross County School District, in partnership with NIET, was awarded a federal Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program grant to implement the Growing and Retaining Educators in Arkansas through TAP (GREAT) project. The GREAT project is using the TAP System to strengthen instructional practices and better support the district's efforts to use educator performance results to inform school- and district-level human capital decisions.

Principal and District Support

Accelerating Character Education Development

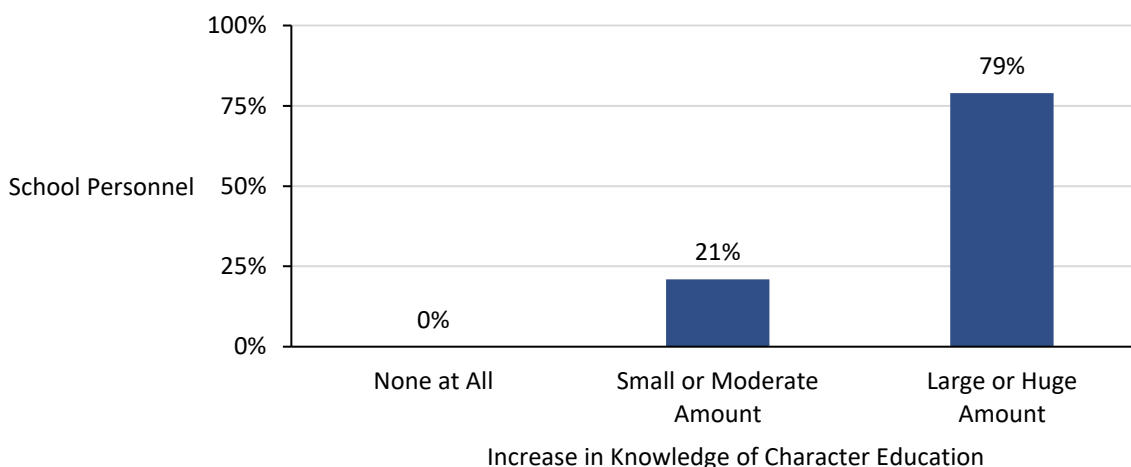
Research highlights the importance of character formation to the overall success of students (Hart et al., 2023; Jeynes, 2019; McCormick et al., 2021). In response, educators are increasingly emphasizing character education along with social and emotional learning skills. Over the course of three years, NIET, the Kern Family Foundation, and schools across nine states worked together through the Accelerating Character Education Development (ACED) partnership to advance school personnel's knowledge and integration of character education.

ACED is a comprehensive framework to assist school personnel to integrate intentional character education into school and classroom practices. ACED services include a Character Companion Tool, initial training, on-site support, and online resources. Below are the key findings from a three-year evaluation of the ACED implementation.

Finding 1: Improvement in school personnel's knowledge about character education

All school personnel increased their knowledge about character education at least a small amount with over three quarters of personnel increasing their knowledge a large amount (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The percentage of school personnel reporting improved knowledge of character education.



Finding 2: Advancement in the school-wide implementation of character education

The school's implementation of character education advanced during the ACED partnership. The top activities that school personnel engaged in to boost implementation included holding character leadership team meetings, discussing character education with teachers, analyzing current school practices about character education, and identifying core values, virtues, or traits for the school.

During the three years of implementation, the ACED partnership has demonstrated that it can develop the foundational knowledge among school personnel for understanding and integrating intentional character education in schools.

Building Educator Capacity in Rural Communities

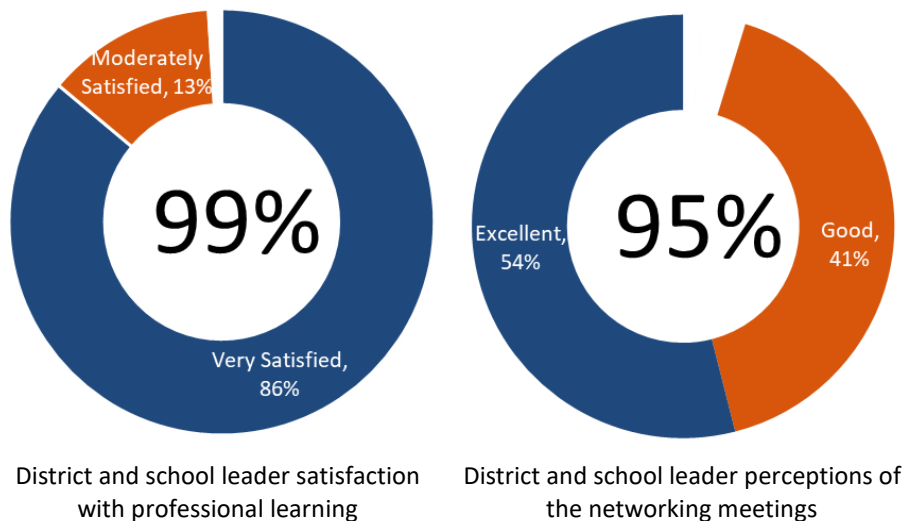
Rural students, constituting about one-fifth of the U.S. student population, often face disparities in educational opportunities and experiences compared to their nonrural counterparts (Marré, 2017; Showalter et al., 2019; Wells et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these disparities, with fewer rural district leaders able to provide online learning opportunities (Herold, 2020).

In the fall of 2020, NIET partnered with the Walton Family Foundation to create the Arkansas Rural Educator Network (AREN). AREN focuses on enhancing teaching and learning in rural districts by providing tailored professional learning, which includes coaching and training, as well as networking opportunities. This network of rural districts provides district and school leaders from across the state with opportunities for collaboration, actionable strategies to strengthen district and school leadership capacity, and tailored support to improve teaching and learning.

Over the past three years, AREN has positively impacted 27 rural districts in Arkansas, benefiting over 23,000 students in its third year. AREN's focus on providing customized professional learning through coaching, training, and networking has yielded positive results in the third year of the partnership as highlighted below:

1. **99% of surveyed district and school leaders expressed satisfaction with the professional learning opportunities.**
2. **95% of surveyed district and school leaders rated the quality of the networking meetings as either good or excellent.**
3. **A statistically significant improvement was observed in teacher observation scores within a randomly selected sample of AREN district teachers.**
4. **90% of AREN districts outperformed their matched comparison districts on student achievement growth in at least one state assessment subject.**

Figure 3. AREN district and school leaders' satisfaction with and perception of AREN activities.



AREN's success results from its commitment to personalized, high-quality service, ensuring ongoing relevance and success. Additional information about the work can be found in [this research brief](#).

Educator Preparation Partnerships

NIET Aspiring Teacher Rubric: A Valid and Reliable Tool to Measure Aspiring Teacher Instruction

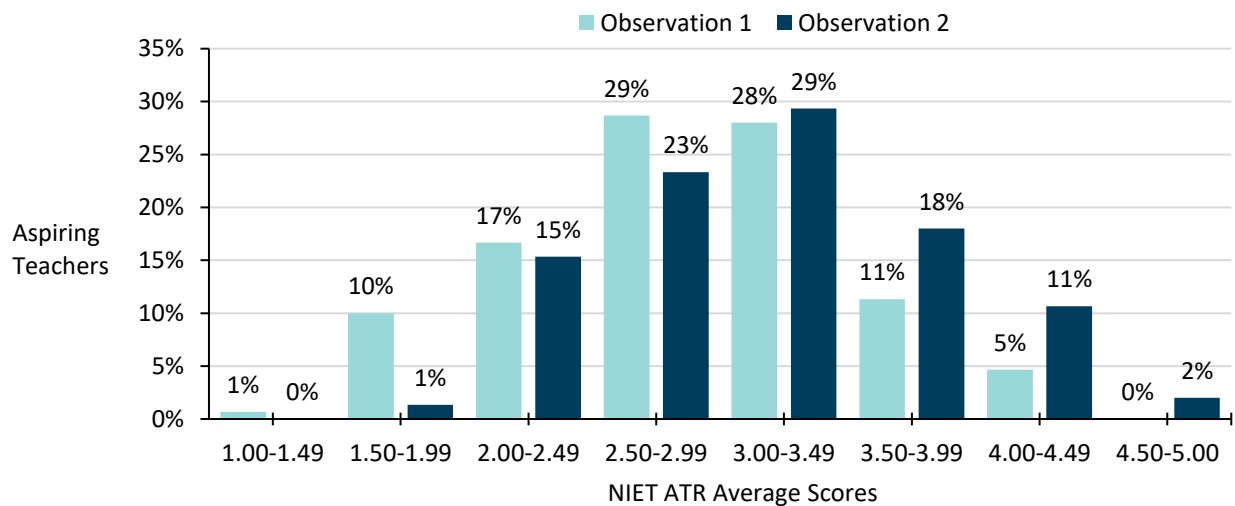
With more than a decade of collaboration with educator preparation programs, NIET designed the NIET Aspiring Teacher Rubric (ATR) which includes 12 indicators that measure key skills and knowledge that aspiring teachers must develop to be prepared for the classroom. The NIET ATR aligns with the standards published by the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium’s Model Core Teaching Standards and Learning Progressions for Teachers, which have been adopted by several states and are required for all programs seeking accreditation from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation.

A study on the measurement properties of the NIET ATR demonstrates its validity and reliability for assessing aspiring teacher instruction during a classroom observation conducted by a trained and certified observer. The analyses establish:

1. **Consequential validity**, ensuring the instrument's purpose of measuring aspiring teacher instruction and providing a common language for observation, feedback, and support is achieved.
2. **Structural validity**, ensuring the NIET ATR measures a single construct, which is aspiring teacher instruction.
3. **Internal consistency**, demonstrating that the 12 NIET ATR indicators measure different elements of aspiring teacher instruction that are strongly related to each other.
4. **Test-retest reliability**, indicating consistent measurement of aspiring teacher instruction.

Additionally, the NIET ATR is capable of distinguishing variation in aspiring teacher performance, as seen in Figure 4’s bell-shaped distribution of observational scores across the entire range. This capability allows for supervisors, mentors, and preparation faculty to provide aspiring teachers with specific and valuable feedback.

Figure 4. Distribution of NIET ATR observation scores from two observations.



Note: Figure based on 150 aspiring teachers who were observed twice using the NIET ATR. It shows the average score of all 12 indicators at each observation, grouped in 0.5 intervals.

Overall, the findings presented in this study suggest that the NIET ATR is a valuable tool to assess and develop aspiring teacher performance. The full study is available in [this research brief](#).

Results from Selected Prior Studies of NIET’s Impact

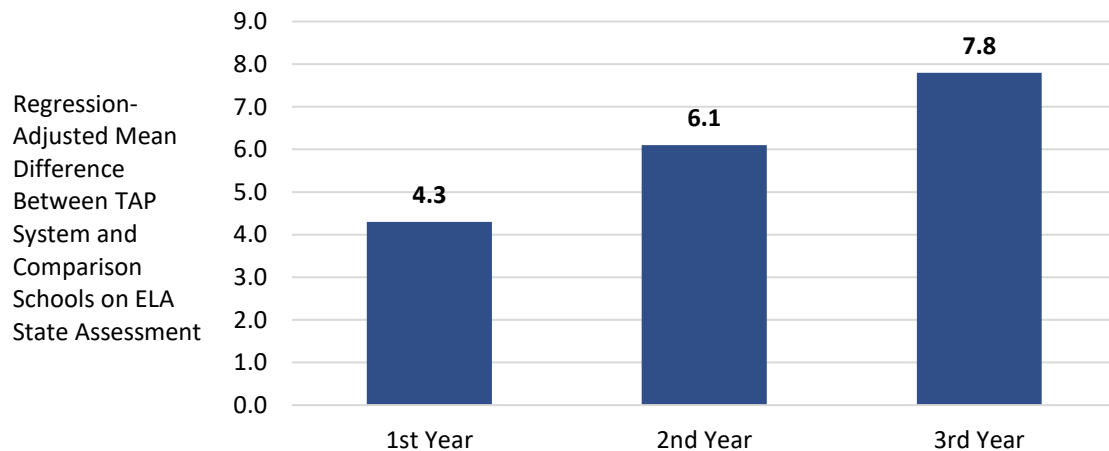
This section summarizes studies conducted in the past five years that showcase the impact of NIET services on student performance, teacher retention and effectiveness, principal development, and educator preparation.

Student Performance

Research shows that the TAP System is associated with improved student achievement in math and ELA, as observed in the following studies conducted in Indiana, Arizona, and Louisiana.

- Staying Power: English Language Arts Achievement After Funded Installation of an Educator Effectiveness System.** Grant funders invest in programs to produce enduring improvement. Investigating the sustainability of program effects addresses concerns of policy makers and grant funding agencies that resources are invested purposefully. In this study, Leutscher et al. (2022) examined the sustainability of outcomes of the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement after an initial, grant-funded installation. The outcome of interest is the percentage of students passing Indiana’s English/Language Arts achievement test. A school-level, quasi-experimental study is performed using propensity score matching to generate a comparison group and regression models controlling for school fixed effects. The results show that TAP System schools sustain improved outcomes beyond the grant (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. The TAP System schools sustained and improved outcomes in relation to the comparison schools.



- Sustaining Success: The TAP System’s Long-term Effects on Math Achievement in Arizona.** Leutscher and Barnett (2020) investigated the long-term impact of the TAP System on the percentage of students passing Arizona’s math achievement test after at least three years of TAP System implementation. Three related school-level, quasi-experimental studies were performed using propensity score matching to generate comparison groups and regression models controlling for school fixed effects. The TAP System schools improved performance at a higher rate than the comparison schools and reduced the gap with the state. Overall, the results show that the TAP System does sustain effectiveness, and that two years of accumulated effects are needed for statistically significant results to consistently manifest.
- Teacher Incentives and Student Achievement: Evidence from an Advancement Program.** Eren (2019) investigated the Louisiana TAP initiative from its inception in 2005-06 through 2010-11,

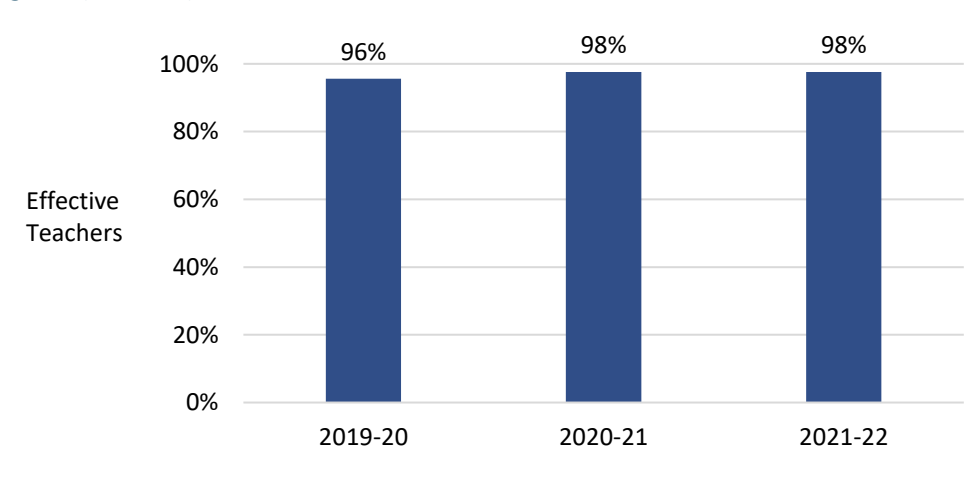
principally as a performance-based compensation model. Twelve high-need schools that adopted the TAP System during the study period comprised the treatment group, while 21 future-adopter schools (adopted the TAP System in years after the study period) constituted the control group. After controlling for baseline year, grade, school, and student characteristics, Louisiana TAP was associated with a statistically significant increase in math achievement during the second year and beyond after adoption. The study found no evidence supporting alternative explanations (student mobility, teacher mobility, or preadoption achievement trends). Overall the study presents “strong evidence that TAP increases student achievement, at least in math” (p. 886).

Teacher Retention and Effectiveness

Research shows that schools implementing the TAP System have higher percentages of effective teachers and increased retention rates.

- Develop and Retain: Building Excellent Educators to Improve Educational Equity. Leutscher et al. (2023) examined the impacts of a Teacher and School Leader Incentive Fund grant on teachers’ effectiveness and retention while implementing the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement. Findings include increased percentage of effective teachers (Figure 6), improved retention of effective teachers, and improved teachers’ instructional skills. Findings suggest that implementing the TAP System to build teacher capacity implements shows promise for improving equitable access to effective educators in high-need schools. Learn more about this project and additional findings [here](#).

Figure 5. The percentage of effective teachers from the first (2019-20) to the third year of the grant (2021-22).



Principal Development

A recent study conducted in South Carolina found that school leaders value the interconnected learning opportunities provided by NIET, which include training, on-site coaching, and networking opportunities.

- Aspects of Professional Learning That Are Most Valuable: Perspectives of South Carolina School Leaders. Developing and retaining effective principals requires high-quality professional learning characterized by customized support tailored to principals’ needs, opportunities for principals to apply their learning and work with a coach, and opportunities to network and collaborate with peers. Many existing programs lack those features. To provide high-quality, comprehensive

learning experiences to school leaders, NIET designed a two-year program for South Carolina school leaders that includes three interconnected learning opportunities: continued professional development, on-site coaching, and virtual networking. In this study, Serdiouk et al. (2023) examined participating school leaders' experiences with those professional learning opportunities. Results indicate that participants spoke favorably of all three learning opportunities, but most participants found on-site coaching particularly useful.

Educator Preparation

Studies conducted on NIET's partnerships with educator preparation programs demonstrate that strengthening the connection between k-12 and higher education institutions can effectively prepare aspiring teachers and school leaders for their roles.

- [Growing Your Own: Revolutionizing Field-based Teacher Preparation to Generate Effective Teachers in High-need Communities.](#) Logis et al. (2021) examined the impact of a grow-your-own teacher preparation model developed through a partnership among NIET, a university teacher preparation program, and two school districts serving high proportions of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric was embedded in university coursework and used to evaluate teacher candidates during clinical training to create a common language around instruction among teacher candidates, university faculty, and district partners. Findings demonstrate successful training of teacher candidates. These graduates demonstrated strong instructional skills, gained employment in schools within partnering districts, and received effective ratings as teachers of record.
- [Breaking the Mold: Impact of a Multi-state Competency-based Principalship Program.](#) Logis and Chan (2020) evaluated the impact of the Leadership Instruction for Teachers (LIFT) Program – a collaboration among NIET, Texas Tech University, and 12 high-need school districts across Texas and Louisiana. The LIFT Program aimed to improve a principal preparation program through a competency-based fellowship and university preparation. The fellowship offered future school leaders hands-on experience in collaboration with highly skilled veteran school leaders. Evaluation of the impact of the LIFT Program showed successful recruitment of high-quality principal candidates into the program, improvement of candidates' leadership and coaching skills, and positive perceptions toward the program. Learn more about the LIFT Program [here](#).

Conclusion

NIET's initiatives stand out because of the more than 20-year track record of growth and success in raising student achievement in high-need schools. This document highlights key factors contributing to our positive impact, including fostering a challenging, rewarding, and collegial environment through the TAP System, addressing individual school and district needs through customized training and coaching for teacher and school leaders, and using a valid, reliable instrument for assessing aspiring teacher instruction. These approaches play a pivotal role in enhancing educator effectiveness and ultimately improving student outcomes.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the input and information provided by NIET partner schools and educator preparation programs, including the willingness of educators to respond to NIET's surveys and participate in focus group meetings. We are also indebted to the work of all of the NIET team members who work with partnering schools each day.

Suggested citation:

Hudgens, T. M., Logis, H. A., Leutscher, T., Serdiouk, M., & Barnett, J. H. (2024). *2023-24 NIET research summary: Examining the evidence and impact of NIET's initiatives*. Scottsdale, AZ: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching.

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Joshua H. Barnett, Ph.D., serves as chief executive officer at the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. Previously, he served as president and chief operating officer for NIET, where he supported NIET partnerships with strategic oversight of research, NIET's higher education innovation, and service delivery. Prior to joining NIET, he worked at multiple universities as a researcher and professor teaching courses in research methods, statistics, and education program evaluation. Barnett earned his Ph.D. in education policy from the University of Arkansas.

NIET Services

NIET services are structured around a core belief that every child deserves an effective educator, in every classroom, every day.

The TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement

The TAP System is an educator-led, comprehensive school reform that establishes distributed and shared leadership structures for building educator excellence and increasing student achievement. The TAP System is focused on attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining high-quality educators. The TAP System creates opportunities for 1) multiple career paths, 2) ongoing applied professional growth, 3) instructionally focused accountability, and 4) performance-based compensation for educators. Through implementing these four interrelated key elements, NIET supports educators to build system-wide change at the school and district level.

School Improvement Solutions

Based on two decades of on-the-ground experience working with high-need schools and districts across the country, NIET's School Improvement Solutions (SIS) is designed to build on the strengths of local education agencies, creating a tailored approach to improve educator excellence through four key areas: 1) instructional excellence, 2) collaborative learning, 3) reflective culture and 4) collective leadership. NIET engages all SIS partners in a thorough site-based needs assessment, then works shoulder to shoulder with school and district leaders to develop a plan that incorporates key areas that lead to positive changes for schools, educators, and students.

Teacher and Leader Development

By restructuring the typical career advancement pathways, NIET helps create opportunities for educators to advance while having a direct impact on the classroom. NIET provides training and on-site coaching and support to build educator excellence. Training and support include supporting district leaders with identifying and developing instructional coaches, principals, district administrators, and teacher leaders.

Rubric and Observation Systems

Based on nationally normed, research-based standards, NIET's Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and NIET Principal Standards Rubric clearly define effective practices for instruction and leadership to foster collaboration around a common language and vision that correlates with student achievement. In addition, NIET's Educator Effectiveness Preparation and Support System (EE PASS) provides online access to professional development, training, and certification resources, as well as a data dashboard to see real-time observation scores and reports.

Principal and District Support

To support principal growth and development, NIET has developed a Principal Leadership Series to support school leaders with integrating and implementing impactful practices aligned to the Principal Standards Rubric. These services are designed to build essential mindsets and skills that help principals elevate their practice and create a culture that advances instructional practice and improve outcomes for all students. Additionally, NIET works alongside superintendents and district teams to build instructional leadership and identify high-impact action steps to improve instruction.

Educator Preparation Partnerships

NIET works closely with universities to prepare a pipeline of exemplary next-generation educators. Specifically, NIET helps educator preparation programs with our Aspiring Teacher Rubric and Portal for Raising Educator Preparation (NIET PREP) to embed research-based, effective principles into coursework and clinical practices.

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