

NIET

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING



NIET Research Summary

Examining the Evidence and Impact of NIET's Initiatives

2024-25

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Executive Summary

For 25 years, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) has partnered with states, districts, schools, and educator preparation programs to strengthen educator effectiveness and improve student achievement. As NIET reaches this milestone, the 2024-25 NIET Research Summary provides an opportunity to reflect on the impact of NIET's initiatives on educator effectiveness, student achievement, and leadership development. Drawing on studies conducted by NIET from the past five years, this report highlights how NIET's TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP System), teacher and leader development, and educator preparation partnerships enhance instructional quality, strengthen workforce stability, and support student success.

Key findings include:

- **Improving Teacher and Student Outcomes:** Schools implementing the TAP System have seen improvements in teacher effectiveness, retention, and student achievement. Long-term studies also link the TAP System to sustained academic growth and broader societal benefits.
- **Enhancing Teacher and Leader Development:** NIET's recommended practices increase both satisfaction with and application of professional development. Additionally, NIET's human capital management strategies – centered on teacher leadership – support teacher retention in high-need schools.
- **Strengthening Principal and District Leadership:** NIET's training and support strengthen instructional leadership, raise school leader self-efficacy, and drive positive change in rural and high-need districts.
- **Bridging K-12 and Educator Preparation:** NIET's partnerships with educator preparation programs help bridge coursework and clinical practice, ensuring aspiring teachers and school leaders are trained to meet the instructional expectations of real classrooms, resulting in better-prepared educators.

With a reach of 350,000 educators and 3.5 million students across 27 states, NIET continues to drive meaningful improvements in education by providing targeted support, instructional coaching, and leadership development that help schools thrive.

Impact of NIET Initiatives

For 25 years, NIET has assisted states, districts, schools, and universities in recruiting, developing, supporting, and retaining educators to improve student achievement. This report highlights the latest research and synthesizes studies that show the impact of NIET's initiatives on teachers, school leaders, and students. The following sections focus on NIET's services including the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement, Teacher and Leader Development, Principal and District Support, and Educator Preparation.

The TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement

The TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP System) is an educator effectiveness model aimed at attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining educators to improve student outcomes. Its theoretical framework consists of four core elements: multiple career paths, ongoing applied professional growth, instructionally focused accountability, and performance-based compensation. These elements work together to create a holistic school improvement system in which educators receive high-quality feedback, regular professional development, advancement opportunities, and compensation for individual and collective success.



Research shows that the TAP System is associated with an increase in the proportion of effective teachers and improvements in their retention (Leutscher et al., 2024b; Logis et al., 2022). It also supports the retention and effectiveness of school administrators (Hudgens & Barnett, 2017). Furthermore, prior studies have demonstrated improvements in students' academic and social outcomes associated with the TAP System (Cohodes et al., 2023; Mann et al., 2013; Schacter & Thum, 2005; Springer et al., 2014). The following studies further illustrate the TAP System's impact on enhancing teacher and student outcomes.

Elevating Teacher Effectiveness for Student Success in Indiana

With support from a federal Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program grant awarded in 2021, Beech Grove City Schools partnered with NIET to strengthen their human capital management system and expand professional growth opportunities through the TAP System. Over the first two years of the grant, Beech Grove City Schools has made notable progress in improving educator effectiveness, retaining effective teachers, and boosting student achievement, as shown below (NIET, 2024a):

- The percentage of classroom teachers rated effective or higher increased from 92% in the first year to 94% in the second year.
- The annual retention rate of effective teachers rose from 81% to 99%.
- Student growth on state assessments nearly doubled from before the grant to the second grant year, relative to comparison groups.

These findings underscore the TAP System's ability to enhance teaching quality, retain effective teachers, and accelerate student achievement in a high-need district. Additional information about the work in Beech Grove City Schools can be found [here](#).

Creating a Foundation for Success in Texas

In 2021, NIET launched Texas IMPACT (Improving Management Systems for Principals And Classroom Teachers), a TSL-supported partnership aimed at increasing educator effectiveness and improving student achievement in three districts across Texas that served a high proportion of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Through this grant, partner districts implemented the TAP System to strengthen instructional leadership, provide embedded professional development for teachers, and align teaching practices across schools. A previous [report](#) summarizes the results of this partnership through the second year of the grant (NIET, 2024b). The findings below highlight key outcomes from an examination of the partnership's impact through the third and final year of the grant.

Finding 1: High percentage of effective educators

Teacher and school leaders' effectiveness was determined based on observation scores using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and the NIET Principal Standards Rubric. In Year 2, 92% of all teachers and 91% of school leaders were rated as effective. In the final year of the grant, 92% of all teachers and 93% of school leaders received an effectiveness rating. This consistent level of effectiveness reflects the ongoing success of the professional development and evaluation processes implemented through the grant.

Finding 2: High percentage of effective educators retained

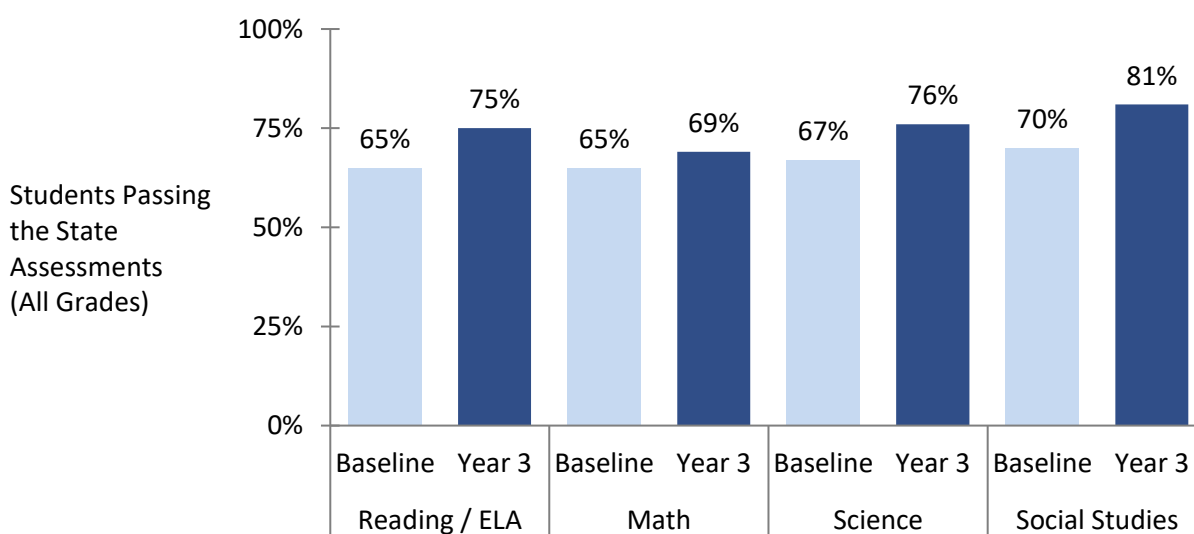
In the final year of the grant, 91% of effective teachers and 100% of effective school leaders were retained by their districts. This marks an improvement from the previous year, when 89% of effective teachers and 93% of effective school leaders were retained. These rising retention rates indicate a positive trend in sustaining effective teaching and leadership, suggesting a promising outlook for continued student success.

Finding 3: Improvement in student performance

Student performance showed notable gains across all four state-tested subjects. As shown in Figure 1, from the baseline year (i.e., the year before the grant) to Year 3, the passing rates increased by 10 points in reading/English Language Arts (ELA), four points in math, nine points in science, and 11 points in social studies.

Figure 1.

Texas IMPACT Districts Improve Performance in all Tested Subjects from Baseline to Year 3



These results demonstrate the impact of Texas IMPACT in strengthening educator effectiveness, improving student achievement, and establishing a sustainable framework for continued success in underserved communities.

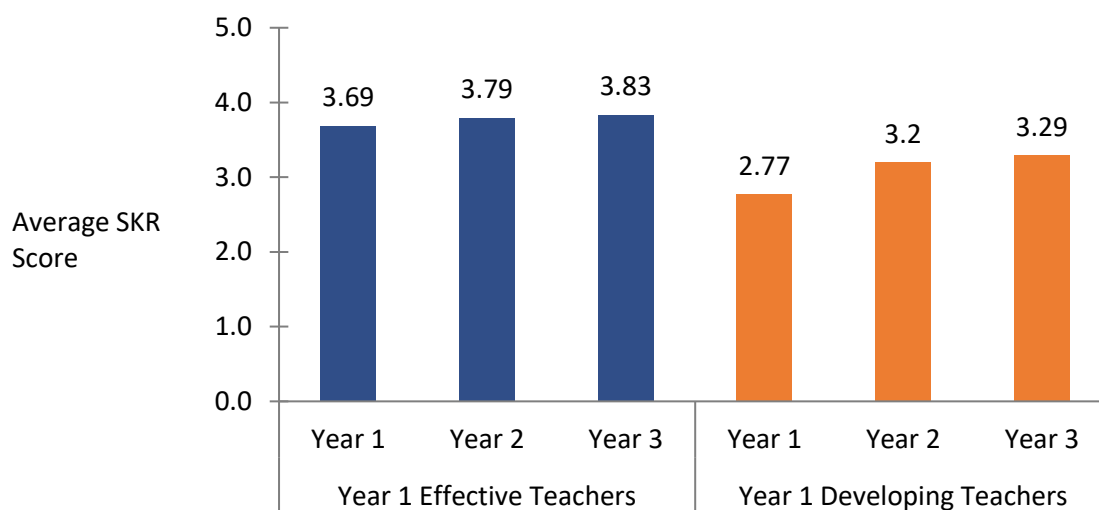
Additional Prior Studies

This section summarizes selected prior studies, each highlighting the impact of the TAP System on both teacher and student outcomes.

- Staying Power: English Language Arts Achievement After Installation of an Educator Effectiveness System. Leutscher and colleagues (2024a), examined the impact of the TAP System on the percentage of students passing Indiana’s English/language arts achievement test following the completion of grant-funded implementation. The study employed a school-level, quasi-experimental design. Propensity score matching was used to generate a comparison group, and regression models were then run controlling for school fixed effects. The results show that schools sustaining the TAP System significantly outperformed matched comparison schools in the first post-grant year, and this improved performance persisted through the third year after the grant ended.
- Building Excellence: Developing Effective Teachers and Advancing Student Achievement in Indiana. Supported by the TSL grant, Indiana districts implemented the TAP System to improve their human capital management system to support both teachers and student outcomes in high-need schools. Leutscher et al. (2024b) investigated the impact of these efforts by analyzing teachers’ instructional skills – as measured by Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibility (SKR) scores – and student state assessment results. SKR scores were derived from combining multiple observations of teachers throughout the year using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and responsibility indicators assessed at the end of the school year. The scores ranged from 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 5 (Exemplary), with half-point increments. The study found statistically significant improvements in teachers’ instructional skills. As shown in Figure 2, teachers who were not effective in the first grant year (developing teachers) improved three times more than those rated effective at the beginning of the grant. These instructional improvements were accompanied by gains in student achievement. The findings suggest that the TAP System strengthened teachers’ instructional skills, ensuring students received effective instruction. Additional information about the study can be found [here](#).

Figure 2.

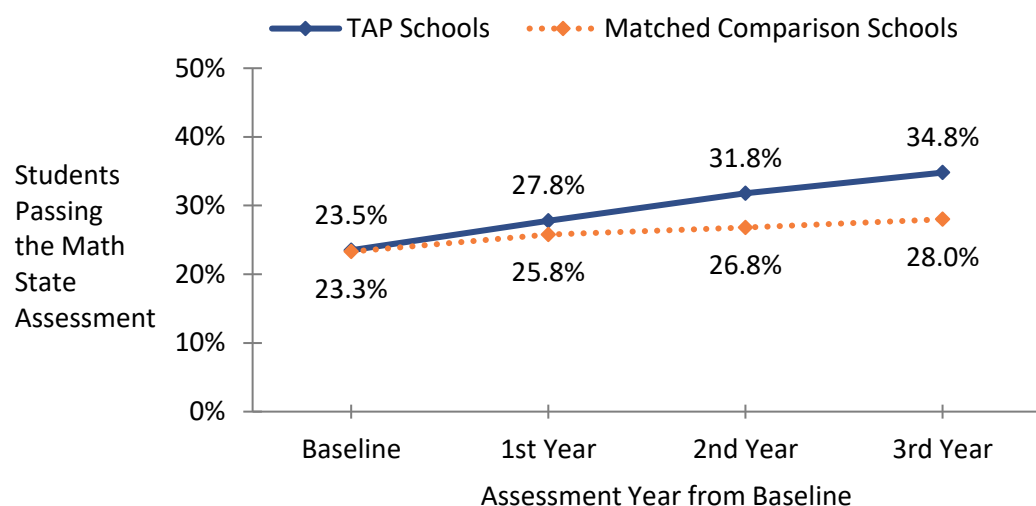
Career Teacher Instructional Skills Improved from Year 1 to Year 3



- 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. The authors performed three school-level, quasi-experimental studies using propensity score matching to generate comparison groups and applied regression models controlling for school fixed effects. As shown in Figure 3, 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 impact of the TAP System continued beyond the initial implementation and that two years of accumulated effects were needed for statistically significant results to consistently appear.

Figure 3.

TAP System Schools in Arizona Outperformed Matched Comparison Schools in Math



Teacher and Leader Development

Over the past quarter-century, NIET has supported 35,000 teacher leaders across more than 25 states, strengthening instruction and providing educators with growth opportunities. NIET supports schools in establishing formal teacher leadership roles by helping define responsibilities, identify strong candidates, and ensure appropriate compensation. These teacher leaders support their colleagues and administrators by leading professional development and conducting classroom observations, ultimately increasing instructional capacity within their school communities. The goal is to build sustainable leadership that contributes to long-term school success. This section highlights a study focusing on teacher-led professional development (Serdouk et al., 2022) and explores the impact of placing teacher leaders at the center of educational initiatives.

What Teachers Value in Professional Development

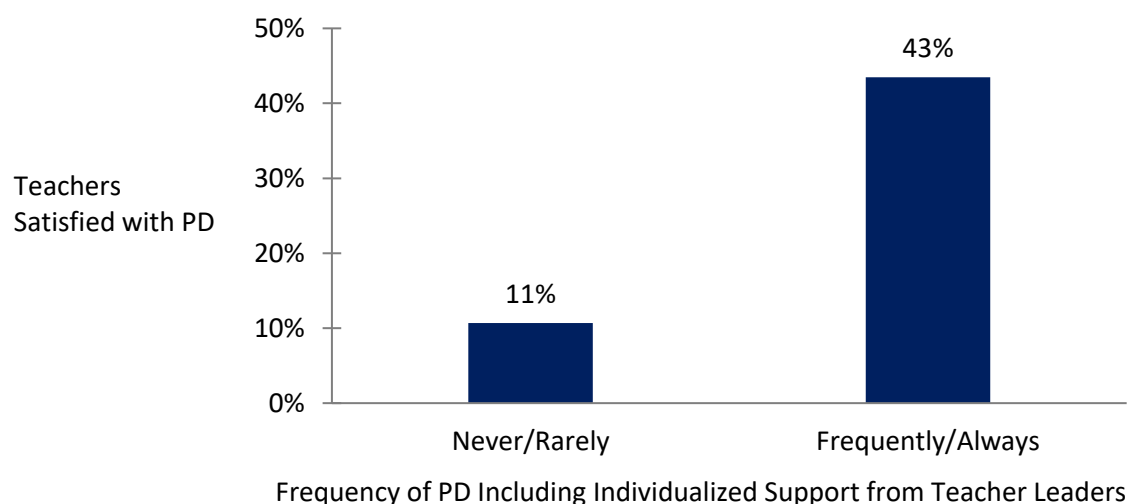
Teacher professional development (PD) is key to improving teacher effectiveness (Desimone, 2009; Hill et al., 2022; Kraft & Papay, 2014; Yoon et al., 2007), which in turn drives student success (Chetty et al., 2014; Herman et al., 2022; Polly et al., 2015; Rockoff, 2004; Roth et al., 2019). Drawing from survey data of over 1,300 teachers from eight states, the study explores how two features of NIET-recommended PD — individualized support from teacher leaders and alignment with teacher evaluation — relate to teacher satisfaction and the application of learning.

Finding 1. Individualized teacher leader support and alignment with teacher evaluation system are each associated with high levels of teacher satisfaction with PD.

Figure 4 illustrates the link between teacher satisfaction with PD and how often PD included individualized support from teacher leaders. When such support was frequent, 43% of teachers reported satisfaction with PD, compared to just 11% when support was rare or absent. A regression analysis confirmed this relationship as statistically significant.

Figure 4.

Teacher Satisfaction with PD based on the Frequency of Individualized Support from Teacher Leaders



Teacher satisfaction with PD was also strongly linked to its alignment with teacher evaluation. When PD frequently aligned with evaluation, 61% of teachers reported satisfaction with PD, compared to just 3% when alignment was rare or absent. A regression analysis confirmed this relationship as statistically significant.

Finding 2. Individualized teacher leader support and alignment with teacher evaluation system are each associated with increased use of PD.

Regression analyses also revealed a statistically significant link between teachers' use of PD information and both individualized support from teacher leaders and alignment with teacher evaluation. Teachers whose PD frequently included individualized support or aligned with evaluation reported greater use of PD. Overall, these findings support NIET's long-standing strategies and confirm prior studies that individualized support and alignment with teacher evaluation are key to effective PD.

Additional Prior Studies

This section summarizes additional prior studies that highlight the impact of NIET's initiatives in strengthening human capital management systems by positioning teacher leaders as central drivers of improvement.

- **Investing in Stability: Enhancing Equity Through Teacher Retention in High-Need Districts.** Logis and colleagues (2024b) examined teacher retention in six high-need districts across two southern states over a four-year period, exploring how human capital management system strategies improve retention and advance educational equity. Survival analysis was performed to analyze the likelihood of teacher retention and assess how teacher effectiveness, measured by Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibility (SKR) scores, influenced this probability. SKR scores were derived from combining

multiple observations of teachers throughout the year using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and responsibility indicators assessed at the end of the school year. The scores ranged from 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 5 (Exemplary), with half-point increments. Results indicated that more effective teachers were more likely to stay. For every one-point increase in the SKR score, teachers were 57% less likely to leave. The study highlights the role of human capital management system strategies in strengthening teacher retention by leveraging teacher leaders to foster a supportive work environment.

- Staying and growing: Increasing equitable access to effective educators in high-need schools. Teachers in high-need schools in the U.S. often face challenges such as high turnover rates and limited access to effective educators. Through a federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant, NIET partnered with school systems in Louisiana, where more than 50% of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. This partnership aimed to strengthen the educator workforce by establishing and leveraging teacher leaders to improve teacher effectiveness and, ultimately, student achievement. In this study, Logis and colleagues (2022) evaluated the impact of the partnership on teacher effectiveness and retention. Results showed an increase in the percentage of effective teachers, high annual retention rates of effective teachers, and improved performance among retained teachers. The study suggested that investing in human capital management systems—particularly by developing teacher leaders—was a critical strategy for improving educator retention and ensuring equitable access to effective teachers in high-need schools.

Principal and District Support

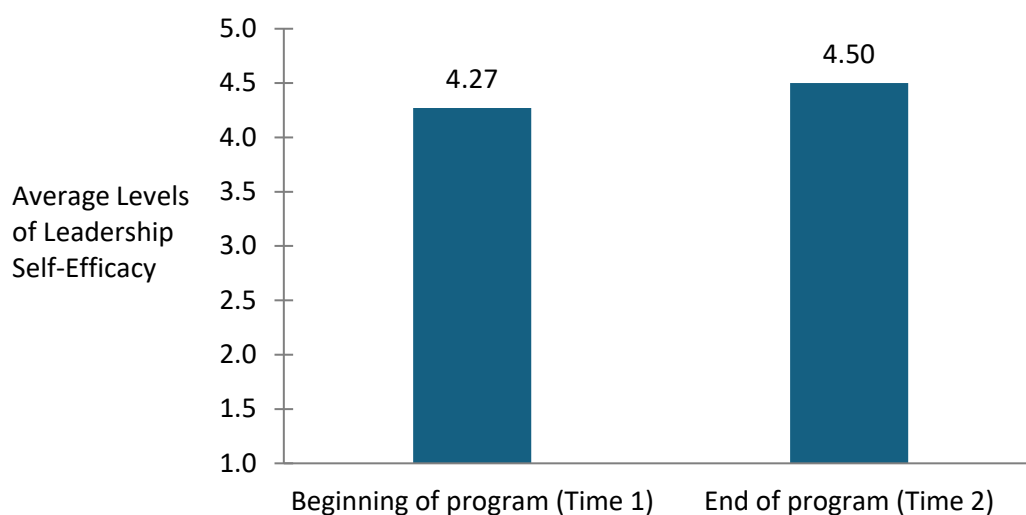
Principals matter. Schools led by effective principals retain more teachers (Grissom, 2011; Hughes et al., 2015), and students in these schools gain nearly three additional months of learning in math and reading each year (Grissom et al., 2021). For more than two decades, NIET has equipped 12,000 school leaders with the skills to prioritize and improve instruction. Working alongside school and district leaders, NIET strengthens instructional leadership and helps identify high-impact action steps to drive systemic improvements in teaching and learning. This support is anchored in the NIET District Instructional Framework, which aligns with NIET's Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and Principal Standards Rubric. This section summarizes recent studies on the impact of NIET's work in supporting school and district leaders.

- Raising Rural: Building Educator Capacity to Improve Student Outcomes. Logis and colleagues (2024a) explored the impact of the Arkansas Rural Educator Network (AREN), a partnership among NIET, rural Arkansas districts, and the Walton Family Foundation. AREN was designed to support districts and schools through customized professional development and networking opportunities. The study found that 99% of surveyed leaders were satisfied with AREN's professional learning activities and 95% rated the quality of networking meetings as good or excellent. Teacher observation scores significantly improved, and 90% of AREN districts outperformed their matched comparison districts in at least one subject area in student achievement growth. These findings highlight AREN's effectiveness in building educator capacity and improving rural education outcomes. Additional information about AREN can be found [here](#).
- Leading with Confidence: Enhancing School Leaders' Self-Efficacy for Instructional Leadership in South Carolina. The self-efficacy of school leaders is crucial to their performance, and high-quality professional learning can enhance it. To examine the impact of NIET's work on school leaders' self-efficacy, Hudgens and colleagues (2024) conducted a study on the South Carolina Principal Leadership Network (SCPLN), a two-year program designed to strengthen leadership in five high-poverty districts through professional development, coaching, and networking. Survey results from

the beginning and end of the program showed that school leaders' self-efficacy significantly improved over time (see Figure 5). The findings suggest that the SCPLN program strengthened school leaders' self-efficacy, a crucial factor in improving school leader performance and increasing the likelihood of their retention in the profession. Learn more about the SCPLN project [here](#).

Figure 5.

School Leader Self-Efficacy Improved Over the Course of the Program



Educator Preparation

Preparing classroom-ready teachers is essential for building a strong education system (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Research suggests that integrating a teaching standards rubric into coursework to bridge pedagogy and clinical experience can enhance teachers' confidence in their knowledge and skills (Emerson et al., 2018; Williamson & Hodder, 2015). Over the past 25 years, NIET has partnered with 105 educator preparation programs to strengthen their collaboration with school districts, better prepare and support new teachers, and increase the placement of well-trained, highly effective educators in schools nationwide. As the following studies illustrate, research on NIET's partnerships indicates that strengthening the connection between K-12 schools and educator preparation programs 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 and colleagues (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 coursework. Of note, the fellowship offered future school leaders hands-on experience learning from 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

With a reach of 350,000 educators and 3.5 million students across 27 states, NIET continues to drive meaningful improvements in education. The findings in this 2024-25 NIET Research Summary highlight how NIET's research-based strategies for building educator effectiveness in K-12 and educator preparation settings contribute to positive outcomes for teachers, leaders, and students. NIET achieves this by implementing a structured support system through the TAP System, delivering high-quality professional development that emphasizes individualized support from teacher leaders and alignment with teacher evaluation, leveraging teacher leaders to strengthen the educator workforce, building school and district leaders' instructional leadership skills, and aligning educator preparation programs with K-12 institutions to better equip future teachers and leaders. Through these efforts, NIET remains a vital partner in ensuring quality educators in every classroom and providing all students with the opportunity for success.

Acknowledgments

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About the Authors

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About NIET

The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Our vision is that every student in the United States is taught by an excellent teacher and supported by effective leaders every year. We believe intentional, sustained, and high-quality supports for educators directly result in success for all students and are essential to eliminating equity gaps. We have confidence in the capabilities of every teacher and student, and we see them rise 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.

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 improves 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 partners with educator preparation providers to prepare the next generation of exemplary educators. To strengthen the connection between K-12 and educator preparation, NIET trains faculty, coaches site coordinators, develops resources, and designs programs for aspiring teachers and leaders. Additionally, NIET offers resources and data management tools through the EE PASS portal.

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