

NIET

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING



2026 NIET Research Summary

Examining the Evidence and Impact of NIET's Initiatives

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Executive Summary

The 2026 NIET Research Summary features five rigorous studies examining the impact of NIET's services on teachers. Each study includes a brief discussion of the rationale, key findings, and implications for practice. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources, these studies provide evidence on how NIET's TAP System, teacher leader development, collaborative professional learning, and teacher evaluation system build educator excellence.

Key findings from these studies include:

- Teacher satisfaction with the TAP System is linked to their intent to remain in their school system.
- Strong teacher leadership improves effectiveness across the broader teaching staff.
- Participants in the NIET Teacher Leader Fellows program strengthen coaching practices and shift leadership mindsets.
- Professional learning is more likely to be applied when it includes individualized coaching and alignment with evaluation goals.
- The NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric distinguishes variations in teacher performance and is positively associated with student outcomes.

Collectively, these findings offer practical, evidence-based guidance for strengthening teacher effectiveness, leadership development, and school improvement. They will inform how NIET refines and scales work with schools and districts nationwide.

Research Spotlight

Teacher Satisfaction with the TAP System is Linked to Intention to Stay

Background

High teacher turnover has significant impacts on students, teachers, school leaders, and the broader school community (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). One key driver of turnover is school working conditions (Berry et al., 2019; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). [The TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement \(TAP System\)](#) is an educator effectiveness model aimed at addressing teacher retention by improving working conditions. Its four elements (Figure 1) align with what research has identified as key factors that support teacher retention, which include strong teacher and school leadership, ongoing professional learning and collaboration, and collective teacher efficacy (Berry et al., 2019). Using survey responses from close to 900 teachers working in TAP System schools, this study investigates how teachers' satisfaction with the TAP System relates to their intention to stay in their current school system over the next five years (Leutscher et al., 2025)¹.

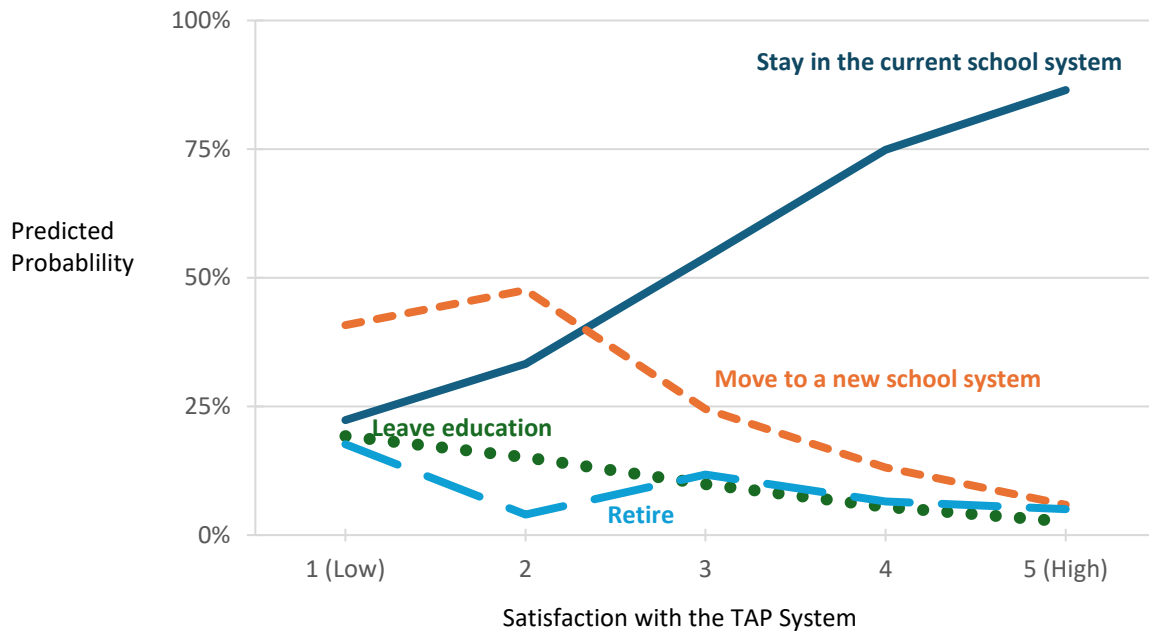
Figure 1. TAP System's four elements of success



Key Findings

Teachers who were more satisfied with the TAP System were more likely to report that they intended to stay in their current school system over the next five years, rather than pursue other employment opportunities (i.e., moving to a different district, leaving education for a different career, or retiring). This relationship is illustrated in Figure 2.

Looking at satisfaction with each element of the TAP System separately, teachers who were more satisfied with **ongoing professional growth** and **instructionally focused accountability** were more likely to report that they intended to stay in their current school system than to pursue other employment opportunities (Figures 3 and 4, respectively).

Figure 2. Predicted probability of teachers' career plans by overall satisfaction with the TAP System

Note: Teachers' satisfaction scores were calculated by averaging their ratings on each of the four elements of the TAP System, ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction).

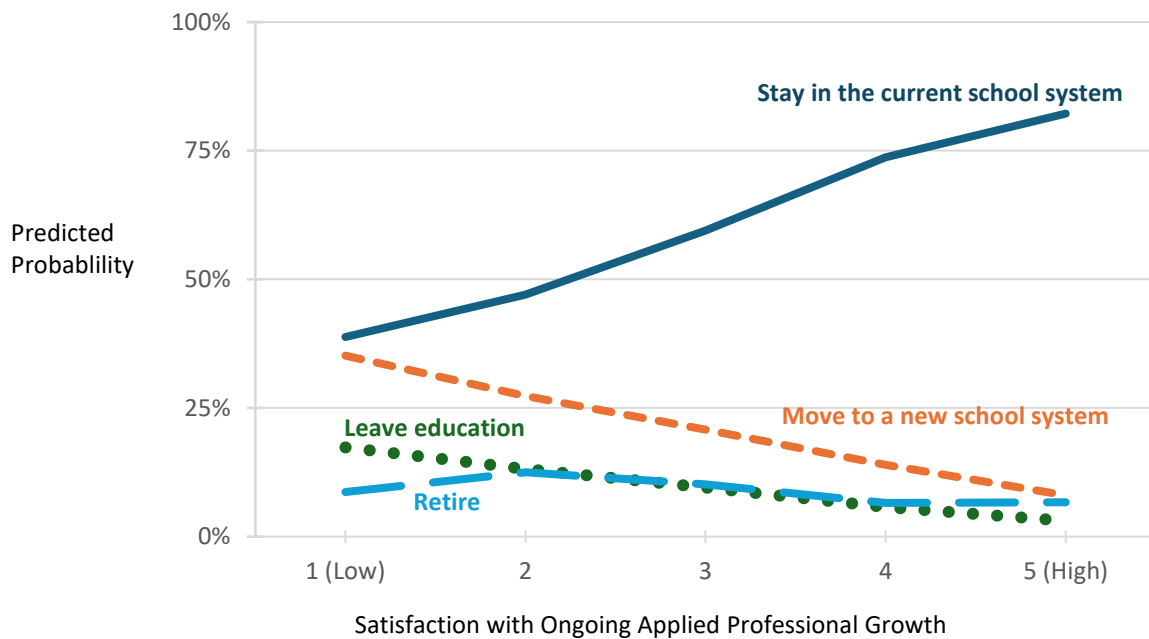
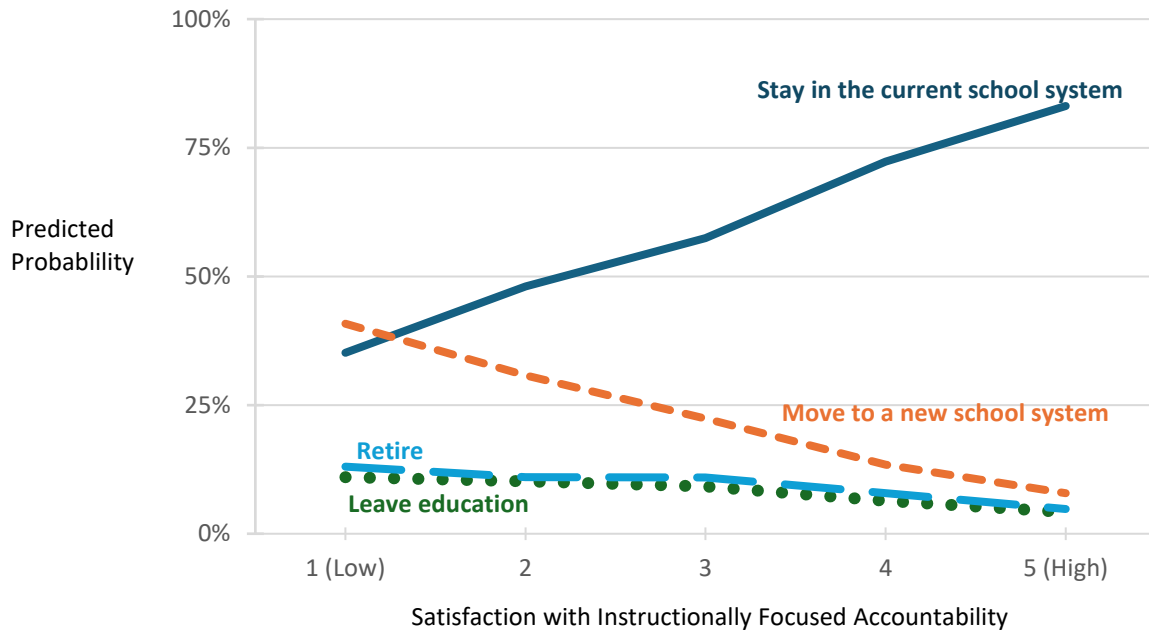
Figure 3. Predicted probability of teachers' career plans by overall satisfaction with the ongoing applied professional growth element

Figure 4. Predicted probability of teachers' career plans by overall satisfaction with the instructionally focused accountability element



Implications for Practice

These results suggest that teachers' perceptions of programs like the TAP System — which shape their working conditions — are associated with their commitment to remain in their current school systems. While teacher intentions may not perfectly predict their eventual actions, they offer an early signal to district and school leaders. Investing in the elements that drive these perceptions, such as ongoing, collaborative professional learning and a fair teacher evaluation process, may be a valuable strategy for strengthening teacher retention.

In addition to its impact on teachers, a recent [study published in the Journal of Public Economics](#) on the TAP System demonstrates its long-term effects on student academic and non-academic outcomes, showing a marginal value of public funds of 14 to 1 — meaning every dollar invested generated an estimated \$14 for recipients. To learn more about the TAP System, visit [our website](#).

Strong Teacher Leaders Make Classroom Teachers More Effective

Background

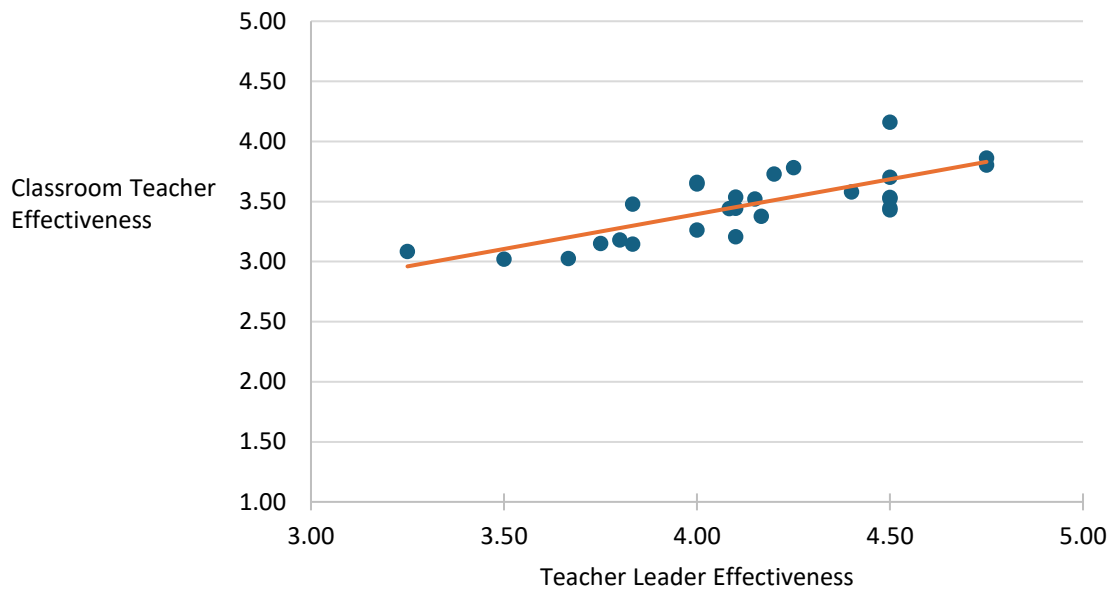
Teacher leaders have been associated with positive outcomes for classroom teachers, student achievement, and school communities (Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020; Supovitz & Comstock, 2023; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). However, much of this evidence relies on perceptions rather than objective performance data (Akman, 2021; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020). This study used teacher evaluation scores to examine whether more effective teacher leaders predict stronger classroom teaching (Logis et al., 2026).

Data were collected from 740 classroom teachers and 130 teacher leaders across 27 TAP System schools in five districts and two states, spanning rural, town, suburban, and urban communities. Both teacher leader and classroom teacher performance were assessed using the summative Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibility (SKR) score based on the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubricⁱⁱ.

Key Findings

Teacher leader effectiveness was positively and significantly associated with classroom teacher effectiveness. This association remained statistically significant even after accounting for other factors that could have influenced classroom teachers' performance, such as their years of experience, the ratio of classroom teachers to teacher leaders, principal's effectiveness and years of experience, and the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

The link between teacher leader effectiveness and classroom teacher effectiveness was notable in size. On average, a 0.5-point increase in average teacher leader effectiveness score, or one increment on the SKR scale, was associated with a 0.29-point increase in average classroom teacher effectiveness, or approximately one standard deviation ($\beta = 0.58, p < .001$). Teacher leader effectiveness alone accounted for more than 50% of the variation in classroom teacher performance. Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between teacher leader effectiveness and classroom teacher effectiveness.

Figure 5. Relationship between teacher leader effectiveness and classroom teacher effectiveness

Note: Each dot represents a school; the line shows the fitted regression from the final model (see Endnotes). All values are based on school-level averages (SKR score, 1–5 scale)

Implications for Practice

These findings suggest that investing in highly effective teacher leaders may be one of the most powerful levers for improving classroom instruction. The association between teacher leader effectiveness and classroom teacher effectiveness held consistently, regardless of classroom teacher experience, school leadership, or student demographics.

NIET is a pioneer in establishing formal teacher leadership roles. To learn more about how to leverage teacher leaders to improve instruction, visit the following resources:

- [Unleashing Teacher Leadership: How Formal Teacher Leader Roles Can Improve Instruction](#)
- [Unleashing Teacher Leadership: A Toolkit for Ensuring Effective Instruction in Every Classroom](#)
- [Achieving Better Results: How Effective Strategic Staffing Increases Teacher and Student Outcomes](#)

A Yearlong Fellowship Strengthens Teacher Leadership Capacity

Background

Teacher leadership can strengthen school culture, teacher performance, and student achievement (Goddard et al., 2015; King & Stevenson, 2017; Muijs & Harris, 2003), highlighting the need to continue to support the development of teacher leaders. This study examined NIET Teacher Leader Fellows Program – a one-year opportunity for K-12 teacher leaders to strengthen their instructional and leadership practices and expand their ability to support colleagues, schools, and districts (Ren et al., 2026). Throughout the program, teacher leaders remained employed in their districts while engaging in fellowship activities.

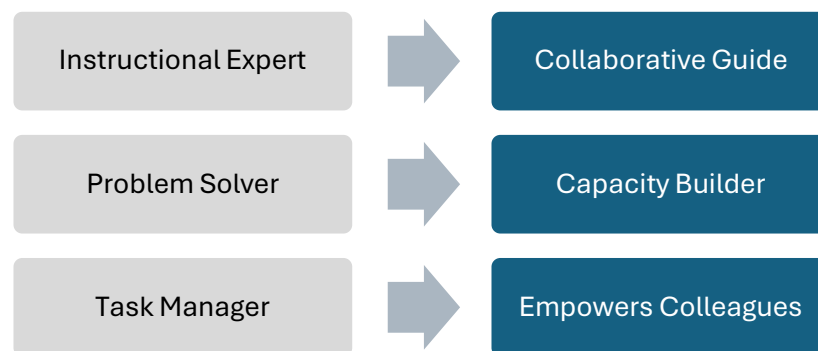
Qualitative analysis using data collected from NIET Teacher Leader Fellows participants shed some light on how the program contributes to teacher leaders' growth and identifies their future growth needsⁱⁱⁱ.

Key Findings

Fellows reported meaningful growth in their skills and how they see their role as leaders.

They reported growth in coaching teachers, identifying educator and student needs, and supporting administrators. As illustrated in Figure 6, their leadership perspectives shifted from acting as instructional experts to serving as collaborative guides, from solving problems to building others' capacity, and from managing tasks to empowering colleagues.

Figure 6. NIET teacher leader fellows reported shifts in how they see their roles as leaders



Fellows left with a clear sense of where to grow next. They prioritized strengthening their current work, expanding their leadership influence, and advancing their careers. They also identified specific areas of continued support they would value, including ongoing professional learning in the areas of coaching conversations, cross-system collaboration, and conference opportunities.

Implications for Practice

This study provided a practical framework for schools or districts seeking to develop programs to strengthen teacher leadership. Continued professional development, cross-district collaboration, and access to conferences can further support teacher leaders as they strengthen current responsibilities, expand their influence, and pursue future leadership opportunities. To learn more about the impact of NIET Teacher Leader Fellows Program, please visit the following resources:

- [Stanford University Selects Teacher Leaders from NIET Partner Districts for Future of Educators Working Group](#)
- [“NIET – That’s What We’re Doing”: 2026 Fellows Ready to Spark Change nationwide](#)
- [The Key to Student Results and Teacher Retention? Great Coaching](#)

Individualized Support and Evaluation Alignment Strengthen Teacher Professional Learning

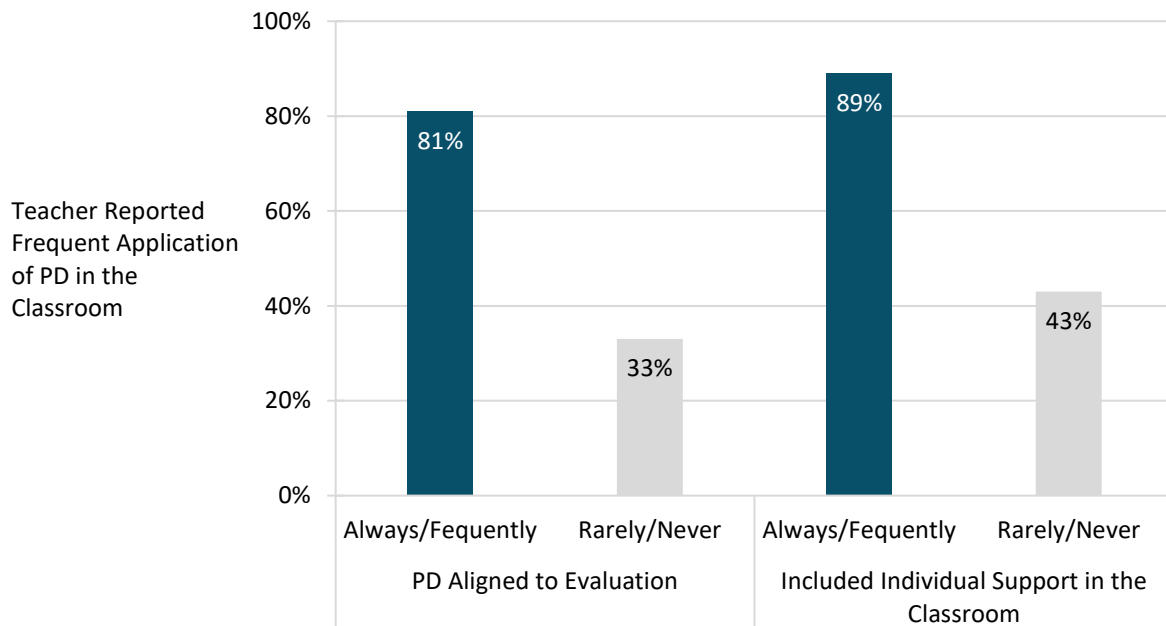
Background

Well-designed professional development (PD) has been associated with improvement in teachers’ instructional knowledge, classroom practice, student outcomes, and teacher collaboration (Desimone, 2009; Kraft & Papay, 2014; Popova et al., 2022). Yet, a recent Teaching and Learning International Survey indicates that only about half of teachers report that their PD is impactful (OECD, 2025) – a gap that raises the question of what separates effective from ineffective PD. One potential explanation is how well teachers are able to apply what they learn in classroom practice.

Analyses of survey data collected from 1,400 teachers across multiple states consistently show teachers are more likely to apply what they learn from PD and perceive it as impactful when it includes: (1) individualized classroom support and (2) alignment with the evaluation system (Barnett, 2026; Hudgens et al., 2026; Serdiouk et al., 2022).

Key Findings

In [one study](#), teachers were far more likely to apply what they learned in PD when it was well-aligned with feedback from their evaluations. As shown in Figure 7, 81% did so when PD and evaluation feedback were frequently aligned, compared to just 33% when they were not. The same pattern held for individualized classroom support — 89% of teachers frequently applied what they learned when they received frequent individualized support, compared to 43% when they did not (Barnett, 2026).

Figure 7. Teacher-reported application of PD by evaluation alignment and individualized support

In another study, both individualized classroom support and alignment with evaluation systems were significantly associated with teacher-reported improvement in teaching performance, student learning, and teacher collaboration (Hudgens et al., 2026)^{iv}.

Implications for Practice

Overall, these studies suggest that schools and districts should prioritize PD that combines individualized classroom support with alignment to the evaluation systems. Together, these characteristics make PD more relevant to teachers' daily practice by tailoring guidance to individual needs and connecting learning opportunities with identified areas for growth. In doing so, schools and districts can build a sustained process of continuous improvement.

NIET's approach to PD is built around two key components: (1) individualized support from teacher leaders and (2) alignment with teacher evaluation. To learn more about this approach and how districts can use this approach to implement successful PD, read our *Educational Leadership Magazine's* article: [Professional Learning That Gets Applied: The Essential Step in Making an Impact](#).

The NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric Distinguishes Teacher Performances and Predicts Student Outcomes

Background

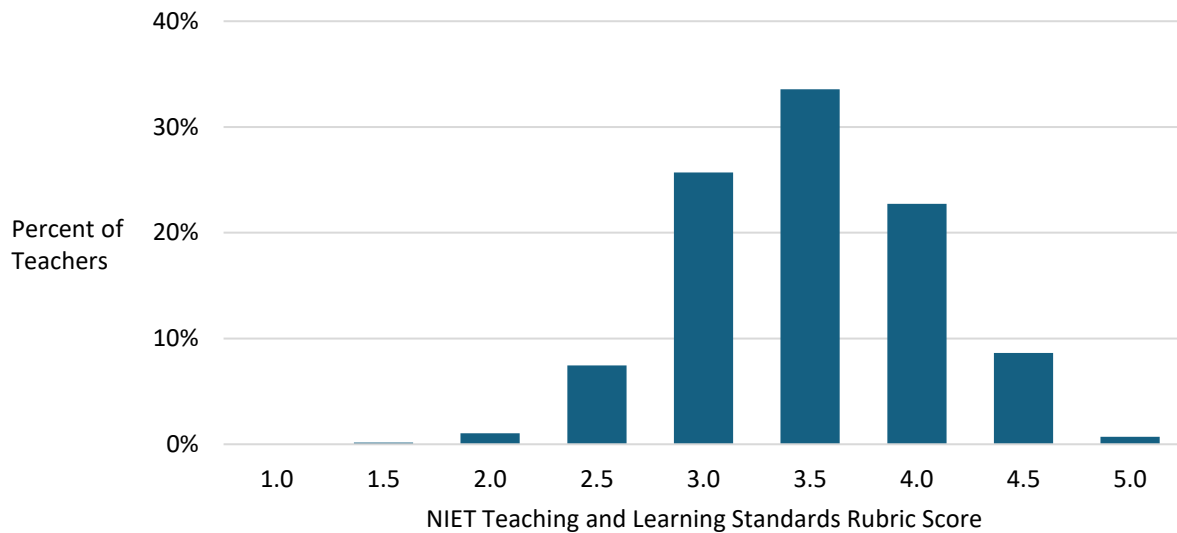
Given that teacher quality is a key lever for student academic success (Jackson et al., 2014; Lee & Mamerow, 2019; Rivkin et al., 2005), it is vital that schools can accurately measure teacher performance to improve teaching and learning. However, traditional school systems have not been successful at measuring and assessing classroom instruction. Previous studies have shown that most teachers were rated at the very highest levels, even though most schools were not performing at these levels (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2014; Walsh et al., 2017; Weisberg et al., 2019).

NIET has developed a comprehensive approach to teacher evaluation that ensures differentiated feedback for teacher improvement. Teachers in schools that adopt the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric are observed several times a year by multiple trained and certified observers. Observation scores are provided immediately as feedback to the teacher in post-observation mentoring sessions. The scores from all observations are combined to create an overall observation score for each teacher. The overall observation score ranges from 1.0 (unsatisfactory performance) to 5.0 (exemplary performance) in half-point increments, with a 3.0 representing proficiency. This study examined the impact of the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric along with the evidence for its validity.

Key Findings

As shown in Figure 8, **the NIET teacher evaluation system is capable of distinguishing variations in teacher performance.** The observational scores in schools that adopt the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric follow a bell-shaped distribution that more closely matches how teachers differ from each other in effectiveness. This distribution allows school leaders to tailor support more effectively, directing additional support and resources to teachers who need the most.

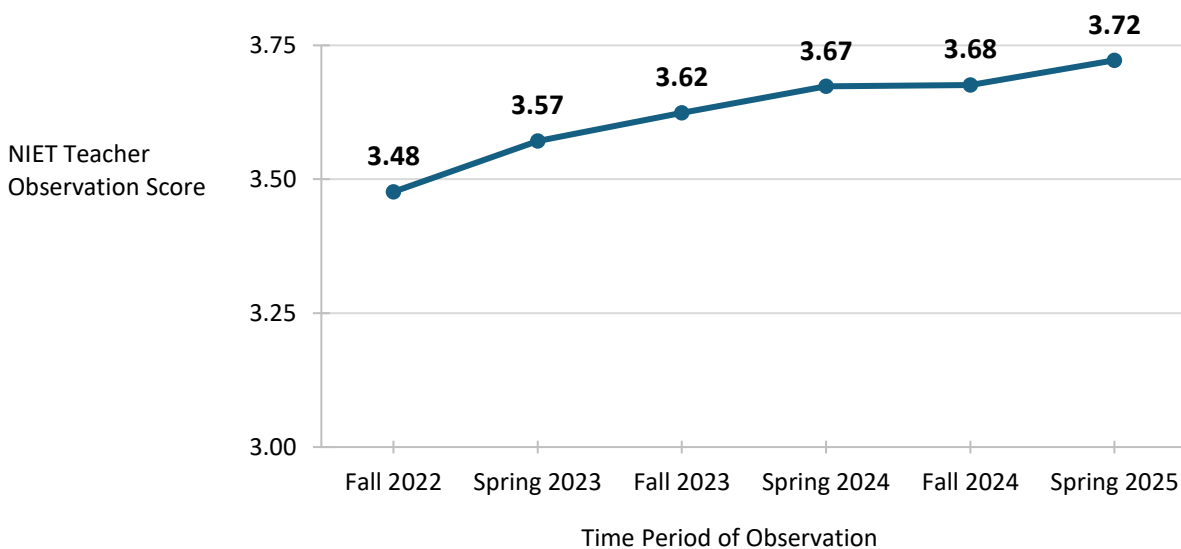
Figure 8. Observational ratings of teachers in NIET partner schools differentiate among levels of performance



Note: Figure is based on over 3,000 teachers and over 6,500 observations during the 2024-25 school year.

Teachers in schools implementing the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric show improvement in instructional quality over time (Barnett et al., 2016; Barnett et al., 2017a; 2017b; 2018). Figure 9 illustrates this growth pattern in NIET partner schools, where teachers continue to improve their instructional skills over a three-year period.

Figure 9. Teachers in NIET Partner Schools improve instructional skills over time

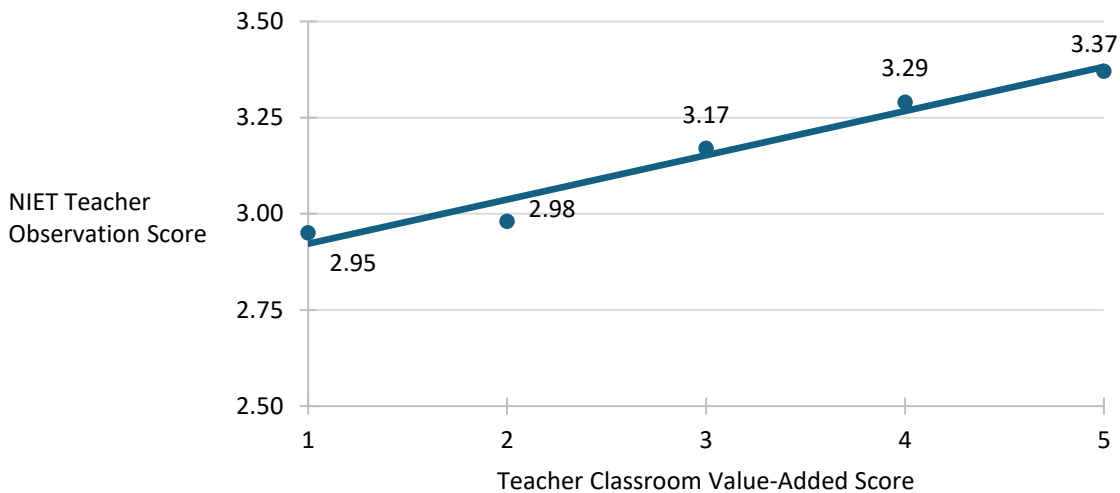


Note: Figure is based on observations of 1,076 teachers across six periods, including fall and spring semesters from 2022-23 through 2024-25. The sample was composed of the same group of teachers observed in every period. Average scores were calculated by weighing the three domains in the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric.

Research investigating the relationship between the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric scores and student achievement have demonstrated strong evidence of validity

(Barnett et al., 2014; Barnett & Wills, 2016; Daley et al., 2012; Kistner et al., 2016). Barnett et al. (2014) fitted a bivariate linear regression model to estimate the relationship between teachers' observational scores using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and their classroom value-added score, finding that teachers rated Proficient on the rubric (scores 3.0 and above) had students who demonstrated at least one year of growth (classroom value-added score of 3 and above). Figure 10 illustrates the relationship between these scores.

Figure 10. A strong relationship between NIET Teacher Observation Score and Classroom Value-Added Score.



Note: The figure is based on data from nearly 5,000 teachers across nine states.

Educators in NIET partner schools also indicate their strong support of the rubric. As shown in Figure 11, 99% of school leaders indicated that implementing the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric has improved student learning.

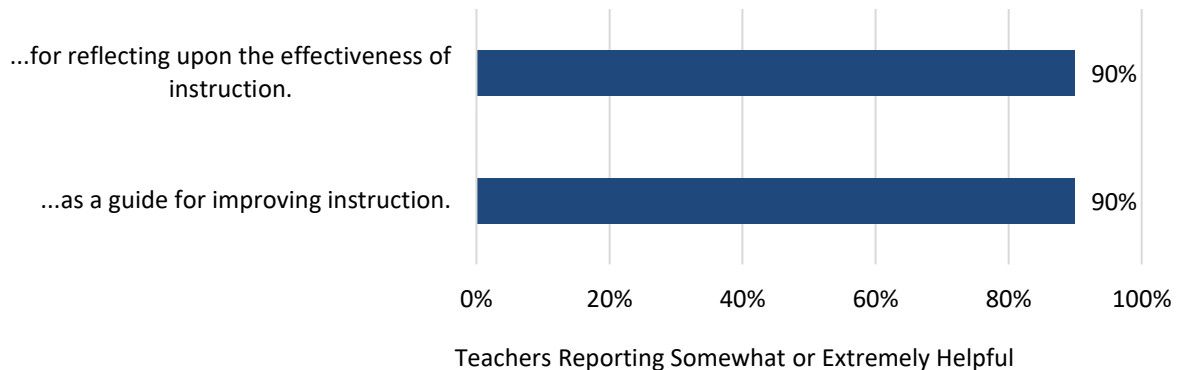
Figure 11. School leaders report that the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric improves student learning



Additionally, 90% of teachers reported that the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric was helpful for reflecting on instructional effectiveness and improving instruction.

Figure 12. The NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric helps teachers reflect on and improve instruction

How helpful is the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric...



Implications for Practice

The findings are clear: the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric distinguishes variations in teacher performance and is positively associated with student outcomes. The NIET teacher evaluation system ensures teachers receive specific, actionable feedback for continuous improvement, which supports schools in building instructional capacity so that all students have access to effective teachers. Collectively, these findings underscore the effectiveness of the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric as a tool for assessing and improving teaching quality and advancing student success.

Endnotes

ⁱ Data were from an online educator survey administered in Spring 2024 to teachers and school leaders working in the TAP System schools. The analytic sample included 895 teachers and teacher leaders. A multinomial logistic regression was performed to assess the relationship between teachers' intentions over the next five years (i.e., stay, leave for another district, leave teaching, or retire) and the TAP System satisfaction index ($\alpha = .85$). First, the model included various respondent characteristics, including National Board certification, years of experience, years in current position, and the respondent's role (i.e., teacher or teacher leader). Then, backward stepwise selection was used to refine the model by iteratively removing the least significant variables, thereby identifying the most influential predictors of teachers' intentions. This same approach was then used to evaluate the relationship between teachers' intentions over the next five years and each component-level satisfaction rating.

ⁱⁱ The dependent variable was the average teacher SKR score at the school level. The primary predictor was teacher leader effectiveness, computed as the average SKR score for teacher leaders within each school. Additional school-level covariates included in the model were: (1) the average years of teaching experience among teachers, (2) the ratio of teachers to teacher leaders, (3) the principal's end-of-year rating ranging from 1.0 to 5.0 in 0.5-point increments, (4) the principal's years of experience, and (5) the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. These variables were selected based on prior research identifying their association with teacher effectiveness (Bada et al., 2020; Hallinger et al., 2014; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Saas et al., 2012). A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to assess the relationship between teacher effectiveness and teacher leader effectiveness. The analysis began with a simple model that included only the main predictor. Next, a full model was estimated, incorporating all school-level covariates. Then, backward stepwise selection was applied to iteratively remove non-significant variables, resulting in a more parsimonious final model that retained the most influential variables.

ⁱⁱⁱ Data were collected through an online survey administered at the conclusion of the fellowship ($n = 12$). Open-ended responses were examined through thematic analysis with an inductive approach to capture recurring ideas related to leadership growth, professional experiences, and future outlook.

^{iv} Data were from an online educator survey administered in Spring 2025. The analytic sample included 1,434 teachers from 49 districts across eight states who had participated in some form of PD in the past year. Separate multiple linear regression analyses were conducted for each outcome – teaching performance, student learning, and collaboration – using the four PD characteristics as predictors: presented by teachers in the school or district, included individual classroom support from expert teachers, aligned with the evaluation system, and took place during regular school hours. Two PD characteristics were consistently and positively associated with perceived PD impact. Specifically, individualized support from experts was significantly associated with teaching performance ($\beta = 0.26, p < .001$), student learning ($\beta = 0.29, p < .001$), and teacher collaboration ($\beta = 0.26, p < .001$). Similarly, alignment with evaluation systems was significantly associated with teaching performance ($\beta = 0.25, p < .001$), student learning ($\beta = 0.21, p < .001$), and collaboration ($\beta = 0.21, p < .001$). PD presented by teachers within the school or district was not significantly associated with teaching performance or student learning, but was positively associated with teacher collaboration ($\beta = 0.06, p < .05$). On the other hand, PD occurring during regular school hours was not significantly associated with any of the three perceived impact outcomes.

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