

# ANNUAL REPORT 2019



NIET

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR  
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING









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# From our CEO A Letter from Candice McQueen

Let me start with a simple  
**“thank you.”**

Thank you to our valued partners, and thank you to the many colleagues and friends who have supported NIET over the past 20 years!



We have so much to be proud of this year as we have set new goals for the organization and have already exceeded performance metrics in the first quarter of our new strategic plan, NIET Now.

These metrics include the following:



Dramatically growing  
**student outcomes**



Expanding **existing partnerships**



Increasing **new partnerships**



Planning for new  
**innovative services**



Increasing our  
**communication avenues**



Improving our  
**social media presence**



Growing and  
**diversifying our staff**

At the same time, I am also personally humbled by the expertise and dedication that have been brought together at NIET! Our team is second to none as they exemplify the best in leadership, teaching, and learning while also embodying the teamwork and enthusiasm necessary to make every partnership successful. I am honored to be part of this group and excited both by what is happening now and the new growth – in student outcomes, quality services, and number of partnerships – we will continue to experience.

For context, I stepped in as the new CEO at NIET in January 2019 after serving as Tennessee's commissioner of education for the past four years. From my very first day at NIET, we connected as a team and quickly got to work to make what is good even better. Our work has centered on clarifying and reinvigorating our mission and strategy, refining our services, developing a new website, and hiring in key areas to support better long-term strategy: communication, delivery of services, and partnership and outreach. We also delivered an impressive annual conference in New Orleans with over 1,200 attendees, spearheaded a strong summer institute in Dallas, led a thoughtful research roundtable in Santa Monica, and hosted a D.C. event on Capitol Hill that highlighted our new teacher leadership report.

Our most important work this year has happened on the ground and in communities across the country as our team members worked with our partners in school districts and higher education institutions. We look forward to sharing many of these stories of success in the pages ahead, but we also want to highlight three achievements in particular:

- In Tennessee, where NIET has been supporting the statewide rubric for the last eight years, the percentage of teachers in 2019 who agreed that **evaluation has led to improvements in their teaching is the highest ever – 76%**. That's up from 38% in 2011-12.
- Our 2019 partner survey showed that **administrators overwhelmingly agree the TAP System has positively affected instructional practices (96%), collegiality (96%), student achievement (95%), and teacher effectiveness (92%)**.
- This fall, we were thrilled to make two additional announcements that underscored the quality

of what we do. In October, we announced that we received a **\$47 million Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program grant and will be part of a \$3 million Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant**, both of which will further our work in Indiana. (You can learn more about these opportunities on page 15.)

Results like these are only possible because our team wakes up every day focused on helping our partners keep the main thing, the main thing: developing educators' talent and strengthening instruction. We fundamentally believe – and our results continue to show – that human capital is the difference-maker in school quality. Regardless of how the national conversation may change, we keep teacher effectiveness at the heart of everything we do – knowing that is the truest pathway to driving equity and creating pathways for every student to be successful.

Every day, we ask ourselves how we can improve our efforts to grow our educators, share our story, and innovate to better serve our partners. And this is just what we do: We follow the same model of continuous improvement that we promote in the field.

So, I will close where I started – with a sincere “thank you.” Thank you to our valued partners, and thank you to our long-term colleagues and friends. Your trust and confidence in NIET have helped us build a truly valuable nonprofit, one whose future has never been brighter!

Best,



Candice McQueen, Ph.D.

## FROM OUR CHAIRMAN AND FOUNDER

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### Message from NIET Chairman and Founder Lowell Milken



As I reflect on 2019, the mission of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching cannot be more potent:

*Building educator excellence to give all students the opportunity for success.*

We have seen this success manifest in the systems put in place in partnerships between NIET and school districts in a variety of educational settings – urban, rural, suburban, charter, tribal. Yet they all share a common thread: highly effective educators at the helm who have the ability to not only embrace a vision, but to share it and advance it.

After all, the operative word in “NIET” is excellence. Decades of experience in education have proven that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its educators or the design on which it is built. When the endeavor is education, the human capital is its beating heart. Developing potential is not only education’s goal, it is the means to achieving that goal. Vibrant and engaged educators offer education’s best chance of producing students with the same qualities.

To significantly improve student outcomes across the board over time is no easy feat. It takes a particular energy, talent, and nerve. It requires the willingness and courage to do more, risk more, share more. It requires the courage and conviction of educators at all levels to stay the course.

These principles are central to our work with classrooms across the country and lead to historic results. One of the highlights of my travels this past year was a visit to Perry Township Schools, Indiana, the inaugural recipient of the national NIET Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness. Faced with rapid and diverse student growth in a short time, Superintendent Pat Mapes told me that: “Success is achieved when educators are trained to adapt their teaching methods to reach children regardless of nationality, socioeconomic background, learning disabilities, and personal challenges. Working with NIET has been a game changer.”

Indeed, the vision that all students can achieve is within reach. We have the attainable answer! As we take this charge with increased partnerships for 2019, we are gratified and fortified by coalitions built as we work to ensure that every student, in every school, is taught by a highly effective teacher every year.

**Lowell Milken**

*NIET Chairman and Founder*

**“Vibrant and engaged educators offer education’s best chance of producing students with the same qualities.”**

LOWELL MILKEN



## KEY SUCCESSES IN 2019

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Throughout 2019, NIET partner schools and districts worked diligently to encourage improvement in schools and districts across the country. This year's results have demonstrated that we grow educators who, in turn, grow students – as seen in multiple data points:

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### TOP 10

**DeSoto, East Feliciana, and Calcasieu** parishes ranked in the Top 10 most improved school systems in Louisiana

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### JEFFERSON PARISH SCHOOLS

Showed **positive trends** on the state assessment and growth metrics and **increased its district performance score** for the first time in four years

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### IBERIA & MADISON PARISHES

Demonstrated **excellence in growth** for African American students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities

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### LAFOURCHE PARISH

Ranked **#2** in Louisiana for outstanding growth, **#1** for economically disadvantaged students, **#4** for African American students, and **#2** for growth among students with disabilities

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### DESOTO PARISH

**#2 in the state for growth** among English language learners and **#10** for outstanding growth

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### EAST FELICIANA PARISH

Went from 26% of students scoring **Mastery+ to 29%**

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### CALCASIEU PARISH

Improved from 36% of students scoring **Mastery+ to 39%**

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### CADDO'S TRANSFORMATION ZONE

Schools in Louisiana **outperformed the state average growth** across subject areas

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### ASCENSION PARISH

One of only four districts across Louisiana to reach over **50% Mastery+**

Ranked **#1** in Louisiana for overall outstanding growth, **#1** for outstanding growth among African American students, **#3** for economically disadvantaged students, and **#4** for growth among students with disabilities

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### EXCEEDING STATEWIDE PROFICIENCY

**Indiana's Perry Township, Brown County Schools, Clarksville Community Schools, West Goshen Elementary, and Southport Elementary** all exceeded the state passing rates on the 2019 exam

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### SOMERSET ISD

in Texas **ticked up to a B** after receiving a C in 2018

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### CROSS COUNTY ELEMENTARY TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY

Recognized by the Arkansas Office for Education Policy for **outstanding student growth on the ACT Aspire** annual assessment

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### WILDFLOWER ACCELERATED ACADEMY

Students in Arizona continued to grow, with **56% passing in ELA** (compared to 53% the year before) and **63% passing in math** (compared to 61% in 2018)

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### AZMERIT

in **Arizona, Avondale, Chinle, Gadsden, and Pendergast Districts** all showed across-the-board increases on the state exam

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### SARAH MOORE GREENE ELEMENTARY

in Knox County, Tennessee, earned the **highest level on student growth**

The number of students who scored **on track or mastered in ELA grew 2.3 percentage points**, and **in math there was a nearly 10-point jump**

# MEET THE TEAM

**Our team sets us apart.**

**Together, NIET's 50 staff members reflect a rich and diverse mix of educators, researchers, and policy experts, all committed to making a tangible difference in schools. NIET's work is guided by the NIET Board and Steering Committee.**

## NIET BOARD MEMBERS

### **Lowell Milken**

Chairman and Founder

### **Dr. Gary Stark**

Vice Chairman

### **Dr. Candice McQueen**

CEO

### **Ralph Finerman**

Treasurer

### **Board Members**

Dr. James W. Guthrie

Dr. Ted Sanders

Ray Simon

## 2019-20 STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### **Bob Behning**

Indiana Representative and House Education Committee Chair; Director of External Affairs, Marian University Klipsch Educators College, IN

### **Dr. Kenith Britt**

Dean, Marian University Klipsch Educators College, IN

### **Dr. Paula Summers Calderon**

Dean, Southeastern Louisiana University College of Education, LA

### **Doug Clauschee**

Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Chinle Unified School District, AZ

### **Dr. James Gray**

Chief of Schools, Jefferson Parish Schools, LA

### **Dr. Saul Hinojosa**

Superintendent, Somerset ISD, TX

### **Dr. Tonia Howard**

Chief of Leadership Development and Special Programs, Lancaster ISD, TX

### **Hayward Renel Jean**

Principal, Mellichamp Elementary School, Orangeburg CSD5, SC

### **Lori Line**

Executive Director of Talent Development and Management, Goshen Community Schools, IN

### **Patrick W. Mapes**

Superintendent, Perry Township Schools, IN

### **Dr. David Mathis**

Deputy Superintendent of College and Career Readiness, South Carolina Department of Education, SC

### **Dr. Nathan Morris**

Superintendent, Cross County School District, AR

### **Julie Thompson**

Executive Director of Elementary Education, Knox County Schools, TN

### **Dr. Jennifer Tuttleton**

Executive Director of Talent Pipeline, Louisiana Department of Education, LA



## Our senior leadership team:



**DR. CANDICE  
MCQUEEN**  
Chief Executive Officer



**DR. JOSHUA BARNETT**  
President and Chief  
Operating Officer



**DR. PATRICE PUJOL**  
Chief Strategy Officer



**KRISTAN VAN HOOK**  
Chief Policy Officer



**SARA GAST**  
Chief of Staff and  
Executive Director of  
Strategic Communications



**LAURA ENCALADE**  
Senior Vice President of  
Strategy and Innovation



**MOLLY SEARS**  
Chief Financial Officer



**VICKY CONDALARY**  
Vice President of  
Services



**DR. ANN SHAW**  
Executive Director  
of Training



**LAURA ROUSSEL**  
Director of School  
Services



**STEPHANIE  
MOSQUEDA**  
Director of Learning  
Technology Services



**DR. DAVITA LANCELIN**  
LA BOLD Project  
Director

## OUR MISSION

# Building educator excellence to give all students the opportunity for success

### OUR VISION

Our vision is that every student in America is taught by an excellent teacher and supported by effective leaders every year. We believe intentional, sustained, and high-quality investments in educators directly result in success for all students and are essential to eliminating equity gaps. 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.



### EXCELLENCE

We hold ourselves and our colleagues to the highest standards that exemplify excellence in our daily work and in achieving our goals. We actively reflect, seek, and give feedback in an effort to advance outcomes for ourselves and the educators we serve. We believe in the importance of continuous improvement, and we constantly strive for a higher level of performance in all of our work.



### TEAMWORK

We believe that teams, composed of high-performing team members, can have an enormous impact on teacher performance and student achievement. We value the diverse experiences and commitment to service that each team member brings. We strive to communicate effectively within teams and across teams, ensuring that we are successful in helping all educators reach their potential.





NIET has a 20-year history of working alongside educators to strengthen student achievement. In 2019, we reflected and refined our mission, vision, and core values to center on what drives our work each day.



#### ENTHUSIASM

We believe in the potential of all students to reach high levels of academic achievement. Thus, we believe that, in collaboration with our colleagues, we can and will build a system of support that helps all students meet their potential. To this end, we operate with a strong sense of possibility, energy, and passion that results in excitement in how we work with our partners and in all that we do.



#### STUDENT-OUTCOMES FOCUSED

We are unwaveringly student-centered in our decision-making, prioritizing the needs of students as we work in states, universities, districts, schools, and classrooms. We align our words and our actions to the core belief that all students can achieve at a high level when we provide the opportunities that they deserve.



# GROWING OUR IMPACT

**NIET has taken our work to the next level in 2019**, transitioning to new leadership, refreshing our vision and goals, developing more partnerships, supporting more teachers, and collaborating more deeply to ensure we remain focused on excellence. Here are a few moments that capture our year in review.

## October 2018

Perry Township Schools is awarded NIET's first **\$50,000 District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness**.

## February

NIET's senior leaders begin to collaborate on a new strategic plan, **NIET Now**, to provide clear goals and aligned strategies for the organization.

## April

NIET leaders and education researchers from across the country **discuss how to scale evidence-based practices in the classroom at the Milken Global Conference**, and NIET publishes a series of research papers with concrete solutions.



**MILKEN  
GLOBAL  
CONFERENCE**

## June

NIET hosts **350 educators for intensive learning and goal-setting** at our annual Summer Institute in Dallas.



**REPORT  
RELEASED**

**"Investing in Teacher Leadership: A Better Way to Make Job-Embedded Professional Learning a Reality in Every School"** is released at an event on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

NIET rolls out a **new website** that better captures the scope of its work and partners' success

## January 2019

**Dr. Candice McQueen starts as CEO** and opens NIET's Nashville office.

## 1,200 March

More than **1,200 teachers and leaders gather at NIET's 19th Annual Conference** in New Orleans, and Wildflower Accelerated Academy is named as the NIET Founder's Award winner.

## May

**NIET's 50 team members gather in Nashville** to step back, reflect, and set plans for moving forward at our all-staff retreat.

## 2x SERVICE DAYS

## July

**NIET doubles the number of service delivery days** from 2018, training more than 2,000 educators in 50 different locations.

## August

State test results continue to show the **impact of NIET's support for teachers** across the country.



**GRANT  
ANNOUNCED**

## October

Dr. McQueen and leaders from Perry Township, Goshen Community, and Brown County Schools kick off our new collaboration through a **\$47 million Teacher and School Leader grant**.

## NIET BY THE NUMBERS

# It has been a busy year for NIET! Here is a quick overview of our work and progress in 2019

**2.75 million**

NIET's efforts to advance teacher quality and school improvement have now impacted more than **2.75 million students across the United States.**

**275,000**

We have helped support more than a **quarter million educators in 8,500 school districts** over the past 20 years.

**75**

NIET collaborated with 75 higher education institutions to help **develop meaningful teacher preparation programs**, up from 50 in 2018.

**168**

We supported **168 K-12 partners** in 2019.

**12**

In addition to the states where we are actively supporting schools, the **NIET team traveled to a dozen more states to share insights** into improving educator training and effectiveness.



**SENIOR TRAINER TEDDY BROUSSARD SUPPORTS LEADERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY**

**4**

We now have **state-level partnerships** in Iowa, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Ohio

**96%**

According to the 2019 NIET survey, 96 percent of school administrators agreed **TAP professional growth activities enhanced teachers' instructional practices.**

**13**

NIET supported teacher excellence in school districts and postsecondary institutions **across 13 states this year** including Arizona, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

**95%**

School administrators broadly agree that the **TAP teacher evaluation system** helps raise student achievement.

**14**

NIET welcomed 14 **new team members** to help advance our mission of improving educator excellence.

# A look at NIET's state and federal work in 2019

NIET's work with partners across the country illustrates the powerful effect that a focus on building instructional leadership capacity can have on classroom teaching and student academic achievement. State policymakers are taking notice, advancing policies and supporting funding opportunities that help position our work as a best practice and model for school improvement.

In 2019, high-profile state initiatives that invest in policies and practices championed by NIET advanced in three key states. The efforts outlined below allow us to continue to strengthen our engagement in critical ways.

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## IOWA



Iowa continued to build on its multiyear investments in teacher leadership in 2019. The state department of education adopted the NIET Iowa Instructional

Framework, which provides educators across the state with a common language to analyze, discuss, and improve classroom teaching. The framework advances the work of teacher leaders and will be supported by the state's Teacher Leadership and Compensation System, a pool of approximately \$150 million each year. Over the summer, NIET trained educators across the state on the framework, including teacher and school leaders from more than 80 school districts and faculty from more than 20 institutions of higher education.

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## INDIANA



This year, the Indiana State Legislature approved a new \$3.5 million grant program championed by Representative Bob Behning with bipartisan support.

House Bill 1008 authorizes the department of education to award grants to support teacher leadership as a core school improvement strategy and specifically lists the TAP System as an approved, evidence-based model. The bill received strong support from educators across the state and was backed by a broad coalition of education organizations, including NIET.

As the legislature was considering this bill, members of the Senate Education Committee visited NIET partner Perry Township Schools in Indianapolis to learn about their teacher leadership system and how they are using teacher leaders to improve professional learning and coaching for classroom teachers. Teachers, principals, district leaders, school board members, parents, and students themselves described the success of this work in building a strong school culture and supporting increased student academic achievement.



## Strengthening Support for Indiana's Educators

### NIET secures \$50 million in federal grants to better prepare, equip, and empower teachers and leaders

NIET had two big reasons to celebrate with educators in Indiana this fall.

First, NIET announced a five-year, \$47 million grant from the federal Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program to expand and sustain work to encourage teachers and improve students' academic success in three Indiana school districts: Perry Township Schools, Goshen Community Schools, and Brown County Schools.

Specifically, the grant will support the implementation of the TAP System across the districts' combined 32 K-12 schools, serving more than 25,000 students, 1,500

teachers, and 80 school leaders. Additionally, the grant will support students' equitable access to excellent teachers and help increase the percentage of teachers of color. Perry Township and Goshen are longtime partners of NIET and will use this funding to deepen implementation. Brown County, a newer NIET partner, will dedicate the funds to developing teacher leadership structures and embedding professional learning districtwide.

Second, NIET has a new opportunity to support aspiring and new educators. Marian University in Indianapolis and NIET announced a partnership aimed at strengthening teachers' preparation and providing ongoing mentorship as educators begin their teaching careers. This work, which will be supported by a five year, \$3 million federal Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant, will establish a yearlong residency and multiyear induction program in three districts: Perry Township, MSD of Decatur Township, and Beech Grove City Schools.

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## TEXAS

The Texas Education Agency released a new \$4 million school improvement grant program in early



2019 that centers on teacher leadership as the core improvement strategy. The state identified a subset of schools that could benefit from a teacher leadership approach and asked applicants to select

an approved expert partner. NIET was approved as an expert partner, along with three other national organizations. Four districts received awards, and all four chose to work with NIET.

NIET looks forward to continuing to enhance our work in targeted states in 2020. We believe firmly in an approach that considers the unique policy environment facing our partner schools in each state, and we will continue working to ensure districts and schools have the support necessary to improve educator effectiveness and success.

## NIET NOW: THE BIG PICTURE

# NIET's strategic plan and vision for the future

Earlier this year, NIET engaged staff and partners in discussion about the next phase of our work. Through a series of inspiring and innovative conversations, we cultivated a new strategic plan – NIET Now – that casts an ambitious vision for strengthening and growing our work and partnerships across the country.

NIET Now introduces a refreshed vision statement that enhances our mission of building educator excellence to give all students the opportunity for success. Our new vision statement hones in on our fundamental belief that educators are the key to driving student improvement and eliminating equity gaps.

NIET Now is designed to further strengthen our work on behalf of the nation's students by identifying opportunities to better support, engage, and impact educators, school leaders, policymakers, and communities across the country. To achieve this ambitious vision and mission, NIET Now outlines a series of specific goals that will guide our work in the years ahead.

In the coming weeks and months, we look forward to sharing more details about our efforts to implement NIET Now and accomplish these goals. As always, your engagement and input are critical. Together, we are excited to build the next phase of NIET's work.

### NIET NOW: VISION & GOALS



**Strengthen current partnerships and expand collaborations** with districts, states, schools, policymakers, and education organizations to increase the impact of NIET initiatives in diverse settings.



**Expand, innovate, and continuously improve NIET service offerings** to address ever-changing education needs across the country.



**Partner with principal and teacher preparation programs** to strengthen educator effectiveness across the pipeline.



**Increase the visibility and position of NIET as a highly regarded** thought leader, expert, and service provider in the areas of educator effectiveness and leadership.



**Maintain strong business operations** to maximize efficiency and inform decision-making.

**“When a robust system of educator support is created, all students begin to grow. We must always keep our focus on the real difference maker: an effective classroom teacher.”**

**DR. CANDICE MCQUEEN**



*Perry Township Schools brought its district leadership team and several school and teacher leaders to the 2019 NIET Annual Conference, where attendees heard more of the story behind their District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness. With a growing refugee population resulting in nearly a third of students being classified as English learners and rising economic need, Perry Township doubled down on excellent instruction, and over the past few years, student progress has consistently improved for all students. Perry Township's proficiency rates now exceed the state average, and they have continued to push themselves to do even more.*



# 2019 NIET National Conference

More than 1,200 educators gathered in New Orleans to **collaborate and learn.**

Each year, NIET brings together educators, policymakers, researchers, and influential leaders from across the country for an annual conference designed to inform, inspire, and engage. This year, more than 1,200 attendees gathered in New Orleans for NIET's 19th Annual National Conference. There, they were able to network with NIET leaders and colleagues and get new learning and reflections they could take back to their schools.

Teachers and school leaders also had an opportunity to meet NIET's new CEO, Dr. Candice McQueen, and learn about her vision for the organization and the next phase of supporting educator excellence. John White, Louisiana state superintendent of education, offered welcoming remarks at the luncheon. To kick off the conference, NIET Founder Lowell Milken delivered a keynote address reflecting on NIET's growth as an organization. Milken highlighted NIET's work to support school improvement and the value of teachers as central to all of NIET's support and services. "High-quality schools filled with well-trained teachers are not only the best answer, but the attainable answer," he said.

The annual conference is designed to equip teachers and leaders, knowing teacher quality is the most important in-school factor in student success. NIET offered more than 80 training sessions over



two days. During these, educators set new goals; dug into NIET's instructional rubric; navigated the implementation of new, rigorous curriculum; and gained insights into how to better grow teachers and coach others. The conference also opened with a panel that featured some of the best district leaders in the country sharing their perspectives on school improvement and how system changes led by teacher leaders have resulted in tremendous outcomes for kids. "Trust the process," said Dr. Cade Brumley, superintendent of Jefferson Parish Schools in Louisiana, during the panel. "When we go all in, we will give students and teachers what they need."

Another goal of NIET's annual conference is to draw throughlines from educator preparation to educators' work at the school level and alignment with district and state efforts. While participants may be focused on their day-to-day work, a gathering like this allows attendees to collaborate and strengthen their collective impact.

Dr. Ann Shaw, NIET's executive director of training, pointed to the diversity of topics as a reason why the NIET conference is so valuable. "I often hear from participants how our conference differs from others they attend because it is truly a learning institute," Shaw said. "They feel we offer a variety of sessions that deepen understanding or extend thinking on a variety of topics for a variety of roles."

That resonated with Lori Line, the executive director of talent development and management for Goshen Community Schools, Indiana. As principal, Line accepted West Goshen Elementary School's NIET Founder's Award in 2018, and she values the conference as an annual highlight. "The NIET conference never fails to push me in my instructional leadership," Line said, having worked in education at the school, district, and state levels. "I grow and learn more as a professional each year I attend."



*Conference participants heard from district superintendents who led their schools to significant gains in student achievement by putting educators front and center. L-R: Dr. Candice McQueen, moderator; Pat Mapes, Perry Township Schools, Indiana; Dr. Cade Brumley, Jefferson Parish Schools, Louisiana; Dr. Lamar Goree, Caddo Parish Schools, Louisiana; Dr. Betsy Hargrove, Avondale Elementary School District #44, Arizona; and Dr. Saul Hinojosa, Somerset ISD, Texas.*



*How can educator preparation programs meet the needs of the school districts they serve? That was the central focus of "Using NIET's Rubric in Educator Preparation," moderated by NIET President and COO Dr. Joshua Barnett (far right). L-R: Dr. Rhonda Wilson, director of the Practitioner Teacher Program at LSU Alexandria; Dr. Fernando Valle, associate professor of educational psychology and leadership at Texas Tech University; Paula Summers Calderon, dean of the College of Education at Southeastern Louisiana University; Dr. Kenith Britt, senior vice president of teacher learning excellence and dean of Marian University's (Indiana) Klipsch Educators College; and Dr. Barnett.*

## AWARD RECIPIENTS

# Highlighting excellence in teaching and learning

Each year, NIET is proud to recognize the extraordinary accomplishments of an outstanding partner school district, as well as one individual school and several finalists. During the 2018-19 year, we were excited to honor Perry Township Schools in Indiana with the inaugural District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness to celebrate their work to raise student achievement by putting teacher leaders at the forefront of school improvement. Additionally, Wildflower Accelerated Academy in Arizona took home the NIET Founder's Award for its long-standing commitment to building educators' capacity and data-driven systems that allow all students to grow. NIET's awards are always a surprise for the recipients.

**The NIET District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness recognizes a district for extraordinary accomplishments in advancing educators and students. The winner receives a \$50,000 prize.**

## 2019 RECIPIENT

### PERRY TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS, INDIANA

NIET's partnership with Perry Township Schools started with Southport Elementary and Abraham Lincoln Elementary in 2010. The schools' progress led Perry to expand NIET's support districtwide in 2012. Perry is the state's second fastest-growing district, in part due to a recent large influx of refugees, and 27% of its 16,000 students are English learners. Now, Perry has not just closed the achievement gap with Indiana on the state assessment, but the district has also surpassed the state passing rate.



**“NIET has empowered our educators to give their best and be a catalyst for students to do their best.”**

**PAT MAPES, SUPERINTENDENT**



**“Four years ago, Avondale Elementary School District never had an ‘A’ school. Wildflower is our first ‘A.’ The NIET framework, specifically at Wildflower, truly was transformational – and continues to be transformational.”**

**DR. BETSY HARGROVE**  
**SUPERINTENDENT, AVONDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**The NIET Founder’s Award, created by Chairman and Founder Lowell Milken, is given annually to one school for exceptional implementation of NIET’s principles to build educator excellence and give all students the opportunity for success. Finalists receive a \$10,000 prize and the winner receives \$50,000.**

## **2019 GRAND PRIZE WINNER**

**WILDFLOWER ACCELERATED ACADEMY**  
**GOODYEAR, ARIZONA**

For eight years, NIET has helped Wildflower focus on data-driven decision-making and work innovatively to identify strengths and needs. Principal Dr. Araceli Montoya helms a leadership team of master and mentor teachers as well as administrators who represent diverse voices at the table. From 2015-16 to 2018-19, Wildflower’s 560 students have increased proficiency in English language arts from 40% to 56%, and from 39% to 63% in math. Wildflower’s third graders have moved from less than 50% proficient to approximately 90% in four years’ time. In 2017, Wildflower received an “A” rating from the state and ranked 3rd in Arizona for growth points earned in a K-8 setting. In 2019, Wildflower was named an “A+ School of Excellence” by the Arizona Educational Foundation for the second consecutive year.



**“What’s beautiful about NIET’s work is the scientific basis to see problems, consider solutions, process ideas, and have an opportunity to solve issues.”**

**DR. ARACELI MONTOYA, PRINCIPAL**

## 2019 FOUNDER'S AWARD FINALISTS

### **ALICE M. HARTE CHARTER SCHOOL, INSPIRENOLA, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA**

Through partnering with NIET, Alice M. Harte developed a rich dialogue around student work and teacher leadership structures. Classroom teachers jump at the opportunities to advance in their careers that are built into the NIET system, which has established a talent pipeline and improved teacher retention at Alice Harte. Data-driven weekly professional learning, regular feedback, and observation have led to improved instruction and student achievement growth. Almost all grade levels improved state ELA LEAP proficiency rates for 2017-18, earning an “A” for progress. For 2018-19, Harte surpassed the state average for progress in English language arts and math.



**“NIET has been highly impactful on Alice Harte because we have been able to dedicate our time and energy on areas where they are most needed.”**

**ROBERT HILL, PRINCIPAL**

### **CROSS COUNTY ELEMENTARY TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY, CROSS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT, ARKANSAS**

Since working with NIET, CCETA has undergone a full culture shift. Through weekly professional learning meetings, pre- and post-conferencing, and strategy development, teachers refine instruction for students and teachers alike. Novice teachers perform at a higher level in a shorter amount of time than before the NIET partnership, and the district actively works to recruit and develop teachers in partnerships with two nearby colleges. CCETA's state rating improved from a “B” in 2016-17 to an “A” in 2017-18, and the school maintained the “A” in 2018-19. CCETA students outperformed students statewide on the ACT Aspire assessment in literacy, math, and science all three years. In 2017-18, CCETA students placed in the top 5% for student growth in Arkansas, top 10% for achievement, and were ranked 6th for overall growth in the “Beating the Odds” (high-poverty schools) category. In 2018-19, the school was named as a Reward School, falling in the top 5% for growth.



**“We’re always working towards a solution, and we’re making great growth because of that. NIET creates a school where people want to be.”**

**JESSICA STACY, PRINCIPAL**

## 2019 FOUNDER'S AWARD FINALISTS

### DESERT VIEW ELEMENTARY, GADSDEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT #32, SAN LUIS, ARIZONA

Recruiting teachers used to be a challenge for Desert View Elementary, a Title I school located along the U.S.-Mexico border. Ninety-nine percent of the students are Hispanic and 94% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Nearly half are English language learners and 13% are migrant. Yet, since NIET became a Desert View partner eight years ago, teachers have been motivated to stay because of the opportunities for leadership, support, and compensation. The school's vision and goals are clearly communicated, and each faculty member leads with a growth mindset. Desert View has been an "A" school for five straight years, with scores increasing annually. From 2015-16 to 2018-19, Desert View students improved by 16 percentage points in English language arts and 20 points in math, surpassing the state average for the first time.



**"We credit our 'A' to NIET because of the support, accountability, and especially the rubric. That is what has made our school strong."**

MEREDITH NELSON, PRINCIPAL

### DODSON BRANCH SCHOOL, JACKSON COUNTY SCHOOLS, TENNESSEE

When Dodson Branch School first partnered with NIET in 2013-14, the rural school was stagnating with a 3 out of 5 rating on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). With NIET's help, Dodson Branch built a stronger school culture by focusing on teacher growth through the creation of formalized leadership roles. The reflection on practices through professional learning meetings helped move every teacher and student forward. Dodson's year-to-year growth has outpaced its peers, and the school is regularly visited by other educators as a model for improvement. With a nearly 100% retention rate in recent years, Dodson Branch is attracting, motivating, and retaining teachers at all levels.



**"The NIET structure and coaching are directly connected to our success. We are now internalizing all those coaching moments and using them with each other."**

TAMMY WOOLBRIGHT, FORMER PRINCIPAL



# Celebrating grand progress in the Grand Canyon State

NIET's success as an organization is tied to that of our partner districts and schools. Among the many victories we celebrated last year, the continued progress of Chinle Unified School District in northern Arizona stands out.

Chinle Unified serves 3,700 students, 98% of whom are members of the Navajo Nation. The remote rural setting creates a range of challenges, with students living as far as 50 miles away from the nearest school and some students living in areas without running water or electricity.

Chinle's schools have historically faced challenges for teachers and students. For years, Chinle teachers felt isolated in their classrooms and struggled to help their students excel. Chinle student test scores were significantly below state averages and other reservation districts. As Superintendent Quincy Natay described, there was no clear vision, beliefs or guiding principles; no valid or reliable curriculum; no systematic process for communications and evaluation of programs; and a lack of trust in district leadership.

**In short, Chinle needed a strategic plan.**

**“We aren’t going to meet the goals we have for students with gimmicks or fads. We had to invest in research-based strategies and in growing the skills of our faculty.”**

**DOUG CLAUSCHEE, ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT**

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NIET**, district leaders developed a plan and set out to build a culture of shared practices. Doors to classrooms opened, and teachers received additional support from school leaders and a cadre of teacher leaders trained as academic coaches.

Together, teachers, school leaders, and coaches focused on identifying and growing exemplars within their own system and spreading those mastery-level best practices to every teacher. The approach was data-driven, practical, and focused. It enabled the district to implement a new curriculum with high-quality instructional materials, and support teachers in the delivery of that new and more challenging content in ways that supported student mastery.

Higher expectations for teachers and the development of teacher leadership roles were backed up with additional compensation. Chinle is now the second highest-paying district in the state of Arizona, having prioritized great classroom teaching in its budgets.

By creating a cadre of teacher leaders, Chinle built a level of instructional excellence and empowered teachers to address challenges. As a result, Chinle has grown from one of the worst-performing to the highest-performing reservation district in Arizona.

Chinle’s teachers have shown the power of collective focus on high-quality instruction for every student every day. “I want to put Chinle on the map,” Superintendent Natay said. “People need to hear our story.”

## SNAPSHOT

### MASTERY

Three years ago, six classrooms approached state averages in reading and math in Chinle. This year, **34 classrooms were recognized for approaching mastery**, with 24 of those classrooms meeting or exceeding state averages on the test.

### ELA

From 2015-2019, Chinle **student passing rates nearly tripled in ELA**. Students moved from a 9% passing rate in 2015 to 24% in 2019.

### MATH

From 2015-2019, Chinle **student passing rates doubled in math**. Students moved from a 15% passing rate in 2015 to 30% in 2019.

### AZMERIT

Chinle students saw a **15% increase in passing rate** on AzMERIT from 2015-2019 (compared to the Arizona average of 7.5%).

### GRADES

In 2015, Chinle schools had all Cs, Ds, and Fs – **now two schools boast Bs** (including one previous F school)



SAVE THE DATE

# Don't miss NIET's 2020 events!

20th Annual Conference  
**March 27-28, 2020**  
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA



NIET Summer Institute  
**June 23-24, 2020**  
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA







**Leaders build leaders.** Mellichamp Elementary Principal Hayward Jean joined his team this spring to engage in professional learning designed around the South Carolina Teaching Standards 4.0, which is based on NIET's rubric. "I wish I knew about NIET in my first year as principal," he told CEO Dr. Candice McQueen. "Our work with NIET has resulted in an instructional culture that is more focused, reflective, and purpose-driven. Teachers are delivering instruction with more clarity, depth, and enjoyment!" Mellichamp Elementary was one of NIET's first partners for School Improvement Solutions, and after the first year, state test results showed fourth and fifth grade students made multipoint jumps in both English language arts and math.



# NIET

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