



ANNUAL

REPORT

2020

NIET

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

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Students are following new protocols from door to door, including these kindergartners at Jeremiah Gray in Perry Township Schools. Photo courtesy of Perry Township Schools.

On the cover: Photo courtesy of Knox County Schools, Tenn.





Letter from the CEO

NIET partners,

When I was writing the 2019 Annual Report letter, I had no idea that just a few months later we would all begin to pivot in ways no one anticipated. While these pivots have been challenging, they have provided new opportunities and ways of thinking. **Today, NIET has successfully moved from pivoting to excelling in new work and new partnerships.** And yet, NIET has also stayed consistent and focused in our work to support educators and drive toward excellence. It has been this balance of staying true to our mission while transforming our efforts to meet the here and now that has made 2020 a success. This year's letter reflects on this journey.

Let's start with a reflection on our partners. We are grateful we work alongside **246 partners who have persevered through unforeseen challenges this year.** Some of our long-time partners were just figuring out teaching in a pandemic when they were hit by multiple hurricanes — and they quickly recovered to meet students' needs. We have worked alongside educators successfully navigating remote learning on a Native American reservation hit hard by COVID-19. We have worked with district leaders and principals who have remained laser-focused on instructional leadership in spite of the many pressing safety and operational needs. And we have had the chance to support more rural districts, where both resources and training were in short supply, and work alongside them as they started school safely. Most inspiringly, we have watched teacher leaders across the country become true guides for their peers on how to teach in 2020, doing everything possible to stay one step ahead. **Our partners have been and continue to be our inspiration and our focus.** While this year has been different, our collective resolve to grow students has never been stronger.

As I **reflect on NIET's team,** I see a group of able and agile superstars who have done whatever it takes to drive instructional excellence. We went from final preparations for our 1,500-person annual conference one week to providing virtual training, free webinars and professional development modules the next, including launching a website that has been accessed 28,500 times. We have continued to provide open resources for educators every week for the past nine months, all while launching virtual training for tens of thousands of educators across multiple states. These training sessions filled up fast — more than 3,000 teachers and principals in South Carolina and

Louisiana signed up within the first week — and have received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

More than anything, the NIET team has been a model of continuous improvement and lifelong learning, **and while how we go about this work may have changed, the “why” has not.** Great teaching is still great teaching, and NIET has embraced the work of developing more than 50 resources, trainings, templates, and tools to show what effective instruction looks like in a virtual classroom. We have been able to reach more teachers, leaders, and schools than ever before to share ideas for taking their teaching to the next level, whether virtual or in-person. We have developed new relationships with educators from Alaska to South Carolina while expanding our work with longstanding partners. In many ways, this experience as shown us new opportunities and new ways we can support teachers that we may not have discovered otherwise — and that is work we want to continue for the decades to come.

This year also gave us a chance to re-center on NIET's commitment to equity. **When we began 20 years ago, our work was — and still is — designed to ensure that every student, in every school, has an excellent teacher every day.** We all know that far too often, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students; English learners; students with special education needs; and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds face systemic barriers that impact our classrooms and limit students' opportunities for success. The TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement was a bold idea to say there is another way, one that empowers teachers and builds capacity to create long-term improvement in schools. That concept, which is embedded in all of NIET's work, drives every single one of our team members. **We know that when we invest in teachers, we invest in equity.** The stories in this annual report will speak to the powerful impact we have had on student outcomes.

Thank you for the work you are doing, and please do not hesitate to let us know how NIET can continue to support you in whatever comes next.



Dr. Candice McQueen

Chief Executive Officer

National Institute for Excellence in Teaching

Letter from the Chairman

2020 marks 20 years of advancing the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's mission of *building educator excellence to give all students the opportunity for success*. The act of "building" is crucial to establish a strong foundation, garner support, create change, and maximize impact.

NIET's initiatives stand the test of time because they leverage outstanding instruction to impact student learning. These structures are a stronghold for schools, especially during educational challenges, from natural disasters and economic declines to a pandemic that has fundamentally changed how educators teach and students learn.

That is particularly true this year. In their nimble response to COVID-19, NIET educators have used professional development "cluster" meetings to reset goals, reimaged teacher observation with virtual learning walks, and embraced technological strategies and tools to engage students in new ways. These practices will no doubt impact the delivery of instruction long-term for NIET partners, and the further elevation of teacher leaders provides schools with a human capital system that intentionally prioritizes student learning amid crises and challenges.

Structures of Leadership and Support Empower Teachers

What sets NIET apart is our system for developing educators as instructional leaders. Early in NIET's work, my meetings with talented teachers in classrooms across the country revealed one common finding: Attracting high-caliber educators is not enough. To maximize their influence, schools needed to give teachers the opportunity to hold formal leadership roles with the responsibility, accountability, and authority to drive instruction and accelerate student achievement. Today, NIET's teacher leaders are unifying faculty around a vision for excellence while providing job-embedded professional development and strengths-based coaching to create a culture of continuous improvement.

Earlier this year, I traveled to San Luis, Arizona, along the U.S./Mexico border to recognize Omar Duron, principal of Southwest Junior High School in Gadsden Elementary School District #32. A product of the community he serves, Omar is one of six district principals to matriculate through the TAP System's career path. He has mentored teacher candidates through NIET's partnership with Arizona State University. Southwest's professional development mirrors Omar's approach: data-driven, methodical, and reflective.



Rigor has intensified during COVID-19, demonstrating how a leadership *team* can adapt to changing circumstances as they strive to create change in students' lives.

Broad Coalitions Scale Up Success

Omar's example is powerful, though not unique. This report illuminates ways schools, districts, states, and universities develop talented teachers who will prepare today's students to be tomorrow's leaders. Indiana, Iowa, Arizona, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Texas serve as models for state initiatives. This year also brought new partnerships in Arkansas, Tennessee, Michigan, and Alaska. The federal Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program and Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) Grant Program make leadership and support a national priority.

Two decades ago, we pursued a bold strategy to meet a crucial demand. Research and experience confirm the correctness of this approach, providing educators the tools to construct a foundation that meets the demands of a changing education landscape. We look forward with confidence and urgency to the next 20 years, as together, we create high-quality opportunities for all.

Lowell Milken

Chairman and Founder

National Institute for Excellence in Teaching

Senior Leadership Team

Dr. Candice McQueen
Chief Executive Officer

Dr. Joshua Barnett
President and Chief Operating Officer

Vicky Condalary
Senior Vice President of Services

Laura Encalade
Senior Vice President of Strategy and Innovation

Sara Gast
Chief of Staff and Executive Director of Strategic Communications

Stephanie Mosqueda
Vice President of Virtual and Learning Technology Services

Dr. Patrice Pujol
Senior Executive-in-Residence

Molly Sears
Chief Financial Officer

Dr. Ann Shaw
Executive Director of Professional Development

Kristan Van Hook
Chief Policy Officer

Dr. Tanée Hudgens
Senior Director of Research

Dr. Davita Lancelin
Director, Louisiana and LA BOLD

The growth of our work (see page 19) has meant NIET has been hiring more than ever. As of mid-October, here are the new team members we added in the past year:

Colleen Bergren
Senior Specialist, Indiana

Nicole Bevilacqua
Senior Specialist, Texas

Nicole Bolen
Senior Specialist, LA BOLD

Julee Broscoff
Executive-in-Residence

Bobby Cox
Executive-in-Residence

Jill Crain
Senior Specialist, Indiana TSL/Louisiana

Angela Davis
Senior Specialist, Louisiana

Christina Faas
Grant Specialist

Erin Foster
Senior Specialist, Indiana TSL

Angela Griffis
Senior Specialist, Texas

Dr. Jessica Hall
Senior Research Associate

Pilar Holtrop
Senior Specialist, Indiana/Arizona

Lisa LaFavers
Senior Specialist, Indiana

Caroline Martin
Director of Strategic Projects

Larry Murphy
Director of Strategic Projects



Dr. Jared Myracle
Executive Director of District Services and Innovation

Rosette Osamba
Senior Specialist, Texas

Keely Potter
Senior Specialist, Tennessee

Hannah Rush
Digital Communications and Content Manager

Dr. Hank Staggs
Director of Accelerating Character Education and Development and East Team Leader

Michelle Wolfenbarger
Senior Specialist, Tennessee

Dr. Amy Wooten
Executive Director of Higher Education Partnerships and Special Projects

NIET BOARD MEMBERS

Lowell Milken
Chairman and Founder

Dr. Candice McQueen
Chief Executive Officer

Dr. Gary Stark
Vice Chairman

Ralph Finerman
Treasurer

Dr. Ted Sanders
Board Member

Dr. James W. Guthrie
Board Member

Ray Simon
Board Member



Equity Statement

At NIET, we believe each of us must take an active role in creating a world in which every person is valued, honored, and heard. Our school communities should and can be places of healing, learning, and discovery of a future that values equity, opportunity, and freedom for Black and Indigenous communities, linguistically diverse, and all people of color. We believe the educators we work with across the country are a powerful source of this change. Each of us must support and invest in our teachers and school leaders as they develop the next generation

of compassionate and culturally responsive citizens and work to build communities where every member is safe, valued, welcomed, and successful. At NIET, we will continue to accelerate the work we do to serve our school and community partners and actively equip our team as we work to create change. Our organization is and always has been committed to ensuring that our actions are reflective of the values, equity, opportunities, and freedom that we believe are fundamental to our existence as human beings.

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.

Theory of Action

Set clear expectations with intentional vision and goal setting

Prioritize and increase instructional excellence and coherence of the instructional core: standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and evaluation and feedback

Grow educator capacity by creating and engaging in ongoing, job-embedded, and collaborative learning to improve instruction

Develop and sustain structures and systems to accomplish goals

Building capacity through training, coaching, and thought partnership with NIET

OUTCOMES



Structure schools for success



Improve classroom instruction



Increase educator retention



Grow student achievement

2020 Year in Review

The past 12 months have provided NIET opportunities to establish new partnerships and strengthen how specialists support educators across the country. Here are a few of the highlights:

DeSoto Parish is awarded NIET's second \$50,000 District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness



NIET sets **new organizational record** for most service delivery days provided in one month, after breaking record in both July and October 2019



NIET celebrates its **20th Anniversary!**

- ▶ NIET is awarded a **\$1.8 million grant** from the Kern Family Foundation to begin the Accelerating Character Education Development (ACED) project
- ▶ NIET releases the popular *2020-21 Planning and Support Guide*
- ▶ NIET releases its **Virtual Companion Tool**

NOV '19

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

NIET holds meeting with **higher education leaders in Dallas** to gather feedback and share new *Aspiring Teacher Rubric*

1,299

hours of service delivered in February 2020

COVID-19 begins to significantly impact NIET partners, and **NIET shifts to providing virtual support**

Duplessis Primary School in Ascension Parish accepts the \$50,000 NIET Founder's Award in a virtual celebration

NIET releases **new tools and services:**

- *Principal Standards Rubric*
- Principal Leadership Series
- Building District Instructional Leadership
- EE PASS app
- Consulting/strategic support



\$4.8 million

awarded through the Walton Family Foundation grant



NIET hosts its first virtual Summer Institute with **500 educators**

NIET updates Environment Domain for the *K-12 Teaching Standards Rubric* to **strengthen expectations** for creating a positive and inclusive classroom

- ▶ NIET is awarded a **federal SEED grant** to partner with higher education and support South Carolina principals
- ▶ NIET partners with **Alaska TSL grant**

- ▶ NIET is awarded **\$4.8 million Walton Family Foundation grant** to support rural districts and schools in Arkansas
- ▶ **Louisiana launches new statewide partnership** with NIET to support teachers with high-quality virtual instruction

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

- ▶ NIET is awarded a grant from The Ayers Foundation and SCORE to support the **Tennessee Rural Acceleration and Innovation Network**
- ▶ *High-quality Curriculum Implementation: Connecting What to Teach with How to Teach It* is released to share lessons learned from NIET partnerships

South Carolina launches new statewide partnership with NIET to support teachers with high-quality virtual instruction

Sarah Moore Greene Magnet Academy in Tennessee and **Mellichamp Elementary** in South Carolina both receive NIET's School of Promise Award

6,000

number of educators in South Carolina who will be supported by the new statewide partnership





TRANSITION TO VIRTUAL LEARNING

A hybrid environment — like that seen at DeSoto Parish's Mansfield Middle School — is now the norm for most of NIET's partners. Since March, NIET has been focused on ensuring that as educators get new tools to do virtual and blended learning, they know how to use those effectively. As an organization, NIET has refocused on effective teaching strategies and how to transform them for an online classroom — and we are sharing those strategies with educators across the country.

Teaching and Leading in a New Normal

NIET did not hesitate this spring to come up with new ways of supporting schools and districts across the country. Within a few days, NIET had canceled its national conference and was sharing webinars, specific strategies, and open resources that provided practical advice and considerations for how leaders and educators could make the most of the sudden shift away from in-person learning. NIET's transition and collaboration have created a foundation for how to best support educators in the months ahead as we learn what 2021 has in store.

Creating Remote Learning Resources for Teachers and Leaders

To address immediate needs, NIET launched a remote learning webpage to include the top resources for supporting a consistent, instructionally rich learning environment for students, adding new tools and resources as those were developed. Since launch, the remote learning site has been viewed 28,500 times. Additionally, NIET started releasing updates in a weekly newsletter that included new, accessible resources for remote teaching and learning in each edition, and was read by tens of thousands of educators.

To assist educators in adapting their practice, NIET released a set of no-cost, self-paced learning modules to help teachers center on effective teaching strategies and provided templates and tools to plan for virtual instruction. Additionally, NIET rolled out several short videos highlighting specific instructional strategies, such as how to best support diverse learners in the virtual space, how to provide quality feedback remotely, and how to utilize success criteria and exemplars in a virtual classroom. To help teachers understand what high-quality virtual instruction looks and sounds like, a new companion tool to the *NIET Teaching Standards Rubric* was released with strategies for effective synchronous and asynchronous instruction aligned to every indicator — and it became one of the most popular resources NIET has ever shared.

Professional Development in an Online Environment

As it became clear that remote or hybrid instruction would continue, NIET immediately began expanding training opportunities to include virtual options. NIET's National Summer Institute shifted to a virtual platform, ultimately serving 500 educators on best practices for remote instruction and support. District leaders also needed targeted advice. Tapping into the expertise of partner superintendents, NIET developed a series of articles and webinars focused on strategies for leading clearly and effectively from a distance. NIET's *2020-21 Planning and Support Guide* provided district and school leaders with guidance for multiple learning scenarios schools faced as they prepared for back-to-school.

In the fall, NIET expanded its online support to offer a three-part series focusing on high-quality remote instruction to prepare and support teachers and administrators. We are continuing to work with districts, and at the state level we have partnered with South Carolina and Louisiana to offer educators a series of targeted 90-minute virtual sessions focused on planning for virtual lessons, delivering high-quality virtual instruction, and creating an engaging virtual environment.

Impact

The impact of NIET's quick response to providing virtual support is clear. During the 2020-21 school year, more than 10,000 educators will be registered for online training through the South Carolina and Louisiana statewide partnerships, and thousands more have already received training over the past few months. Educators from around the country have utilized NIET's new suite of resources and services and shared what has been most helpful for them. In 2020, NIET expanded our reach beyond current partners to new areas and audiences, and our organization will continue supporting teachers, school and district leaders, and students who are navigating the next phase of teaching and learning — whatever that may look like.



28,500

number of times the remote learning page has been viewed since its launch

Key Resources and Partner Spotlights

Here are a few pieces of NIET's work during the pandemic that have been most effective at supporting educators across the country.

2020-21 Planning and Support Guide

Summer 2020 presented a unique circumstance for district leaders as they faced the unanticipated challenges of planning for an unknown fall semester. NIET quickly released the *2020-21 Planning and Support Guide* by the end of May. The resource included guiding questions and steps for creating a plan that prepared leaders for four different learning scenarios: all students attending school in-person, some students attending in-person while some attend virtually, all students attending school virtually, and students intermittently learning remotely.

Additional resources accompanied the tool, including spotlights on three specific planning challenges:

- *Unfinished and Continued Learning: Planning for the Recovery of Standards and Content*
- *Leveraging All Instructional Staff: Staffing to Support Continuity of Learning for Students*



NIET Specialist Angela Davis joined Principal Donnie Love at Plaquemine High School in Iberville Parish to analyze student work and teachers' planning materials.

- *Planning for Diverse Learners: Creating Plans for Re-entry That Maximize Accessibility for Diverse Learners*

NIET's *2020-21 Planning and Support Guide* has been viewed nearly 12,000 times, and has become a staple on district and state websites and in planning toolkits and articles across the web, including the Arizona Department of Education's guidelines, the Alabama Department of Education's *Roadmap to Reopening Schools*, the Minnesota Department of Education's guidance for 2020-21 school year planning, the Connecticut Association of Schools website, EducationNext.org, and more.

STATEWIDE VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION TRAINING IN LOUISIANA

This fall, the Louisiana Department of Education launched a new partnership with NIET to provide a training opportunity similar to South Carolina's but tailored to the resources and rubrics in use by Louisiana's schools.

In addition to providing synchronous training options after school and on the weekends, NIET is also designing asynchronous professional development modules to provide Louisiana educators with on-demand access to better understand what high-quality virtual instruction looks and sounds like.

The first training sessions filled up within 24 hours of the launch in

October, and the state's response to support teachers has been greatly appreciated. This partnership builds on NIET's longstanding work with Louisiana educators and current support for 300 schools across the state by now helping educators better grasp how to transform these teaching practices and use of high-quality curriculum into a virtual or hybrid setting.

2020 By the Numbers

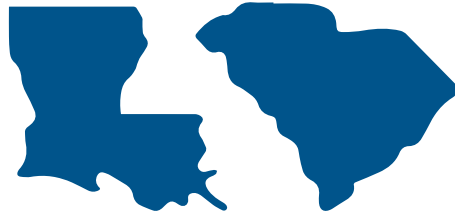
50

NIET created **50 videos, resources, and tools** to help educators transition to virtual instruction



17,100

Video resources NIET developed in response to COVID-19 have been **watched 17,100 times**



11,000

educators in Louisiana and South Carolina will have the opportunity to participate in synchronous statewide virtual instruction training in 2020-21

3,000

educators in Louisiana and South Carolina registered for sessions in the first week they were announced

47%

We now serve 246 K-12 and higher education partners, a **47% increase** from last year



246



28,500

NIET's Remote Learning website, including a page with top free resources, has been **viewed 28,500 times**

11,552

The 2020-21 *Planning Guide* has been **viewed 11,552 times**



250%

The number of visitors to NIET's website **increased by 250%** from July to September compared to the same time in 2019

Statewide Virtual Instruction Training in South Carolina

In August 2020, the South Carolina Department of Education and NIET partnered to offer educators the opportunity to participate in three 90-minute sessions focused on effective virtual teaching practices, and nearly 2,000 educators registered in the first week. These sessions are available at no charge, are easily accessible to all educators, and will be available throughout the school year to meet the demand of educators.

Feedback from participants confirms that these learning opportunities — centered on planning, instruction, and the environment — provide a clear understanding of what the *South Carolina Teaching Standards 4.0* rubric looks like when

applied to online teaching. The training offers ideas for how to plan, transform, and strengthen virtual lessons and how educators can improve student engagement and increase student achievement growth in a virtual environment.

After attending the training, one South Carolina educator said: “I’m feeling much better about where I’m headed this year.” Another educator noted that the training provides “simple strategies for teachers as they plan for virtual instruction!” Survey data so far indicates that the vast majority of participants find the training to be practical and effective at giving them the skills they need to take into their classrooms immediately.



NIET Specialist Claire Murray is one of our South Carolina-based team members supporting about 150 sessions this fall on high-quality virtual instruction.

ADDITIONAL NEW TOOLS FOR EDUCATORS



EE PASS iPad App

NIET offers educators access to an exclusive training portal with unprecedented support. EE PASS, the Educator Effectiveness Preparation & Support System, provides access to valuable professional development, training, and certification resources, including a video library, data management tool, evaluator certification, and training modules and archives.

This spring, NIET launched a new, free EE PASS iPad app that includes key features and off-line data syncing so educators can use the tool no matter what their connectivity looks like without losing their work. From the iPad app, educators can access teacher observations and scripting; a video and content library; educator evaluator certification; surveys; and reports. The iPad app is available to download now in the Apple App Store and further enhances NIET’s ability to assist teachers and coaches in navigating the virtual environment of modern classrooms.



Deep Dives: Transformation of Lessons from In-Person to Virtual

Educators know that transitioning to virtual teaching from the physical classroom setting is more than just a shift in modality. Teachers have

had to transform their in-person lessons for the virtual environment, and NIET released a set of deep dive resources that contain strategies for how to adjust instruction effectively. Each section of this resource explores an instructional indicator, how it is utilized in a high-quality in-person lesson, and then how it transfers to the virtual space.



Webinars and Videos

NIET has developed a series of webinars and videos highlighting our expert staff demonstrating specific virtual instruction strategies, and we are continuing to release those this fall. Topics include engaging students in a virtual learning environment through models and examples, leading virtual professional learning communities, co-constructing success criteria with students, providing high-quality feedback virtually, and supporting learners with diverse learning needs.

Videos are also available on the NIET website to support aspiring educators, and school leaders can benefit from the new Teddy Talk series, which features advice for principals from NIET’s senior advisor and former National Distinguished Principal Teddy Broussard. NIET’s recent videos have been viewed more than 17,000 times, and they provide advice and support for educators through a fresh medium that can be revisited time and time again.

Rubric Companion Tool for Virtual Instruction

The *NIET Teaching Standards Rubric* provides a road map for high-quality instruction and a common language for educators. As schools shifted to remote learning in early 2020, educators voiced a need for guidance around how the strong teaching practices within the rubric translate to the online environment. NIET developed a tool, the *NIET Rubric Companion for Virtual Instruction*, to accompany

the *NIET Teaching Standards Rubric* and describe what key instructional indicators should look like and sound like when teachers are planning and delivering virtual learning. The resource details specific practices and ideas for both asynchronous (on-demand) and synchronous (real-time) learning. Though designed as a complement to the *NIET Rubric*, it can help any educator deepen their understanding of high-quality virtual instruction. The tool has been viewed 5,000 times by teachers and leaders across the nation since its release in April 2020.

NIET K-12 Teaching Standards Rubric

COMPANION TOOL FOR VIRTUAL LEARNING

DOMAIN: INSTRUCTION

INDICATOR	PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTORS AT THE EXEMPLARY LEVEL	VIRTUAL LEARNING STRATEGIES	ADDITIONAL SYNCHRONOUS CONSIDERATIONS
Academic Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oral and written feedback is consistently academically focused, frequent, and high-quality. Feedback is frequently given during guided practice and homework review. The teacher circulates to prompt student thinking, assess each student's progress, and provide individual feedback. Feedback from students is regularly used to monitor and adjust instruction. The teacher engages students in giving specific and high-quality feedback to one another. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide office hours for students to log in at designated times to receive timely feedback on assignments. Provide written feedback in a timely manner virtually through email or discussion platforms aligned to the lesson's objectives and success criteria. Engage in written discussions and check for understanding between students by making comments on one another's written responses in a collaborative document tool or platform. Have students share work with another student for feedback prior to submitting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model for students how to interact with one another and the teacher, and provide specific feedback aligned to the lesson's objective in breakout rooms and in the chat. Allow students to complete tasks at different levels and time frames, with some students remaining in the breakout rooms while others return to the main room to engage in a feedback discussion facilitated by the teacher (no lag time to lose engagement).
Grouping Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The instructional grouping arrangements (whole class, small groups, pairs, or individual; heterogeneous or homogeneous ability) consistently maximize student understanding and learning efficiency. All students in groups know their roles, responsibilities, and group expectations. All students participating in groups are held accountable for group work and individual work. Instructional group composition (in terms of race, gender, ability, and age, for example) is varied to best accomplish the goals of the lesson. Instructional groups facilitate opportunities for students to set goals, reflect on goals, and evaluate their learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide clear directions and responsibilities for group work. Consider whether the lesson lends itself to grouping students. Group composition should be considered to ensure strong virtual collaboration. Utilize self-assessment and peer assessment tools with group work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan breakout group strategies and composition to ensure strong management and pacing. Model breakout group expectations and assessment with each group. Set clarity around what is expected, when it is expected, and how groups will proceed in the main room.



GROWING THROUGH A PANDEMIC

In 2020, in addition to the new efforts to support teachers virtually, NIET expanded and created new partnerships. In Urbandale Community School District, Iowa — pictured here during a previous school year — NIET helped to train teacher leaders to serve as coaches and instructional leaders. This is part of NIET's partnership with the Iowa Department of Education to support the state's Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) System and the Iowa Instructional Framework resource. Nearly 100 districts have now adopted the framework, and NIET expanded its support in 2020-21 through offering deep dive trainings and other opportunities for educators to further explore effective instructional practices.

New Partners Embrace NIET's Framework for Success

With new challenges come new opportunities. 2020 has been proof that, with high-quality investments in structures that build capacity for success, effective teaching can happen in any modality.

Alaska: The Alaska Council of School Administrators received a 3-year federal Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program grant in partnership with NIET and four rural, high-need districts: the Northwest Arctic Borough School District, Yukon-Koyukuk School District, Alaska Gateway School District, and Nenana School District. The project, called Increasing Performance and Retention in Alaska's Rural Schools, will support the creation of structures for professional learning communities, school leadership teams, and educator observation, feedback, and evaluation. It will serve approximately 475 educators and 2,500 students through both in-person and virtual coaching and training.

Arizona: Phoenix's Roosevelt Elementary School District, serving 9,000 students, is partnering with NIET on a Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) School grant from the Arizona Department of Education. The project focuses on 15 out of the district's 19 schools that have been identified by the state as needing support. NIET provides principal coaching and teacher leader support, and is helping to transform professional learning communities into data-driven decision-making hubs based on the individual needs of teachers and students.

Indiana: NIET partnerships in Whitko, Muncie, Martinsville, Michigan City, and Nettle Creek received approximately \$2.5 million collectively through the Indiana Career Ladder program, which will help the districts to establish instructionally focused teacher leadership structures. "Our teacher leaders are facilitating positive change as they demonstrate what's possible with students through shared leadership and collaboration within their buildings and across the district," said Cathy Bildhauser, director for K-12 curriculum and instruction for Michigan City Area Schools.

Iowa: Iowa entered its second year of implementing the Iowa Instructional Framework, based on the *NIET Rubric*, with 96 districts in the 2020-21 school year. Investments in both the Iowa Instructional Framework and the Teacher

Our teacher leaders are facilitating positive change as they demonstrate what's possible with students through shared leadership and collaboration within their buildings and across the district.

Cathy Bildhauser, director for K-12 curriculum and instruction for Michigan City Area Schools

Leadership and Compensation System have helped districts define teacher leader roles and responsibilities, deepen coaching conversations based on the real-time needs of teachers and students, and foster student ownership of learning. "We are creating a culture where teaching is a team sport and a public act," said Dr. Crista Carlile, director of teaching and learning for Urbandale Schools. "The formal teacher leadership roles are the conduit to achieving this culture."

Michigan: Beginning a new state partnership, NIET became an approved provider for Michigan's Teacher Leader program. The program was developed to address the state's teacher shortage by better recruiting and retaining effective educators while creating positive and supportive school cultures for them to thrive. The NIET program involves a combination of teacher leadership training and experience to equip teachers to mentor their peers effectively and drive school growth.

Louisiana: NIET has deepened statewide partnerships in Louisiana in a variety of ways (see page 14 for more on the statewide training on virtual instruction).

Starting in the 2019-20 school year, NIET began a new partnership under the Louisiana Mentor Teacher Initiative to equip elementary school teachers to support yearlong residents and other new or developing teachers. When NIET's trainings and support were piloted in Assumption Parish and Algiers Charter, educators called it a "double win." Aspiring mentors are not only working toward an official state certification, but are also sharpening skills in their daily work.

Additionally, NIET is developing rubric-based tools and resources the Louisiana Department of Education can use statewide to help educators further understand what effective teaching looks like in a virtual environment, and more work is on the horizon for summer 2021.

South Carolina: NIET, in partnership with the University of South Carolina and the Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity (BranchED), received a 3-year, \$2.5 million federal Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant to build the capacity of South Carolina’s principals and school leaders and advance equity. The focus of support will be on equipping school leaders to increase students’ access

to high-quality STEM education and social-emotional learning opportunities. The grant will support training in six high-need districts, reaching 150 administrators in 95 schools who serve a total of 58,000 students.

For more on support in South Carolina, see page 16.

Texas:
Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA): NIET was selected as a provider of the Teacher Incentive Allotment, a teacher designation and strategic compensation program that allows districts to receive up to \$32,000 a year for effective educators based on multiple measures of skill and performance. NIET will deliver a wide spectrum of services to help districts

design TIA plans, including assisting with the creation of local designation systems, application for funding, readiness, teacher observation and appraisal, data analysis, compensation, change management and communication, and teacher leadership and support systems.

Mentor Program Allotment (MPA): Through the Texas Mentor Program Allotment, NIET is partnering with 16 districts to create systems that pair beginning teachers with mentor teachers and develop high-quality in-person and virtual training to support them. Mentor teachers learn how to coach new teachers on making data-driven improvements in instructional practice, using T-TESS (the Texas



We are creating a culture where teaching is a team sport and a public act. The formal teacher leadership roles are the conduit to achieving this culture.

Dr. Crista Carlile, director of teaching and learning for Urbandale Schools

Teacher Evaluation and Support System) as a tool. The MPA provides \$1,800 per new teacher, and NIET's 2020 MPA partnerships serve over 300 new teachers. For more on what this program looks like in practice, see page 23.

Resilient Schools Support Program: Houston ISD (the nation's seventh

largest school district), along with Grand Prairie ISD, Spring ISD, and San Felipe Del Rio CISD, are partnering with NIET on Texas' Resilient Schools Support Program. NIET will work with each district to deliver world-class remote learning education in 2020-21, in alignment with on-campus instruction. The support will include

ongoing, customized coaching and professional development.

Tennessee: In addition to its work with TRAIN (see page 22), NIET has entered into four new partnerships through its School Improvement Solutions initiative, including work with the Tennessee School for the Deaf, the Tennessee School for the Blind, Haywood County Schools, and DeKalb County Schools. NIET is also part of a new grow-your-own grant with Tennessee Tech to establish and strengthen teacher pipelines in six districts.

Below: Educators and students at Algiers Charter in New Orleans are still enjoying the chance to learn in person, even if it looks a little different. *Photo courtesy of Algiers Charter School.*



Investing in What Works

Philanthropic investors play a critical role in spurring innovation in public schools and meeting student needs, and in 2020, NIET has partnered with philanthropic organizations in three key projects to support districts in real time as they navigate the pandemic.

Advancing Innovation in Tennessee Rural Districts

In partnership with the The Ayers Foundation, Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning and Innovation, and State Collaborative on Reforming Education

The Tennessee Rural Acceleration and Innovation Network (TRAIN) was established quickly in summer 2020 to support 15 rural districts — most of which are considered economically distressed or at-risk — as they prepared for back-to-school and considered what professional development their teachers and leaders most needed for 2020-21.

Starting in July, TRAIN districts engaged in weekly collaboration with NIET and Ayers Institute consultants to develop continuous learning plans, design and provide professional development to start the year, and solve key problems. Monthly meetings provide opportunities to share highlights and best practices, and all districts are now regularly working with NIET and Ayers Institute specialists to provide ongoing support for educators.

“Supporting rural Tennessee has been my passion, and this is a moment when I believe philanthropy must play a role

in ensuring students and teachers in rural Tennessee have what they need to be successful,” said Janet Ayers, president of The Ayers Foundation.

Supporting Teachers and School Leaders in Rural Arkansas

In partnership with the Walton Family Foundation

Building on an idea sparked by the TRAIN initiative, NIET partnered with the Walton Family Foundation on a 3-year, \$4.85 million grant to deliver high-quality remote and in-person learning to a network of 25 rural districts. NIET partnered with the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators to select the partner districts in the fall and is engaging in a strengths-based needs assessment to focus support in areas like curriculum implementation, teacher leadership, principal leadership, and virtual/remote instruction. Additionally, the partners will have the chance to participate in regular networking sessions to share best practices.

After the first year, NIET will build a longer-term plan for each partnering district to ensure sustainability and increase schools’ instructional capacity. As the project progresses, the partnership can point to strategies and approaches that Arkansas leaders could take statewide.

Supporting rural Tennessee has been my passion, and this is a moment when I believe philanthropy must play a role in ensuring students and teachers in rural Tennessee have what they need to be successful.

Janet Ayers, president of The Ayers Foundation



As part of the TRAIN network, the 15 rural districts meet monthly in virtual meetings to learn and problem-solve together.

Equipping School Leaders to Support Character Education

In partnership with The Kern Family Foundation

Under a \$1.8 million grant, NIET is working with The Kern Family Foundation to develop and pilot a companion tool to the *NIET Principal Standards Rubric* that will help school leaders integrate effective character development and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills into instruction and school culture. This project, Accelerating Character Education and Development (ACED), will give leaders concrete practices and coaching tools to embed strong character education into their instructional leadership approach. Once created, NIET will provide training and videos of promising practices, as well as host interviews with effective principals and small groups. NIET will also develop four online modules for principals to deepen and continue their learning.

The work kicked off this fall with an advisory council meeting to garner ideas and shape the direction of the work. The 3-year project consists of a 2-phase pilot that will ensure the tools and resources are high-quality and reliable before they are offered broadly to schools nationwide.

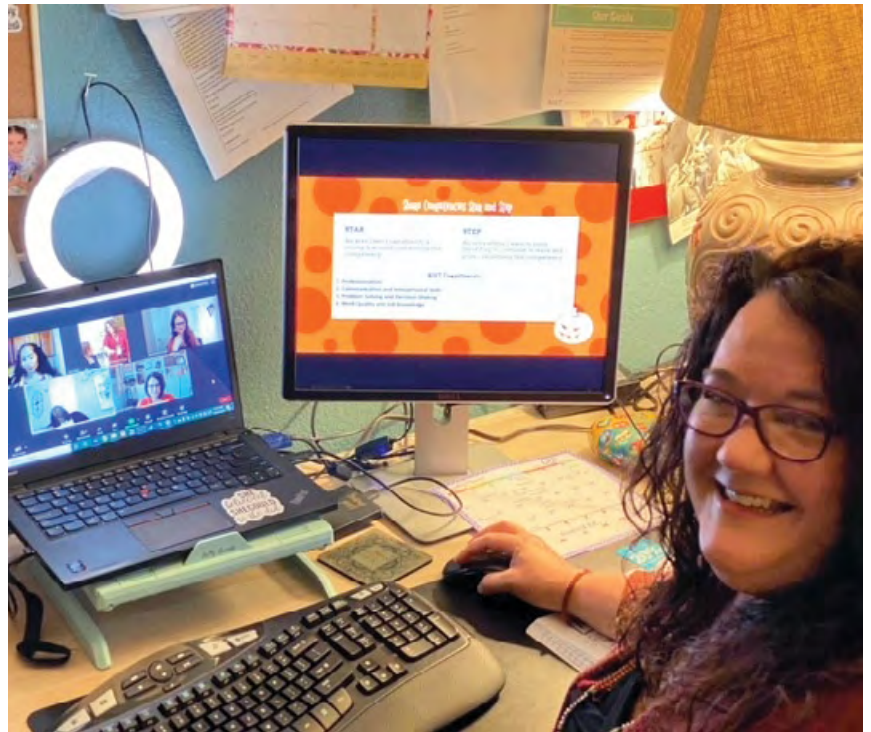
Supporting New Texas Teachers to Be Effective — and Stay in the Classroom

This past year marked another growth milestone with NIET's Texas partnerships. Among other new work with the state, NIET was approved as one of two potential partners for the Texas Education Agency's Mentor Program Allotment (MPA), through which districts can receive funding to develop or strengthen a mentorship program that pairs new teachers with mentors who have a demonstrated record of success. NIET was chosen by most districts that applied for MPA funding, and now NIET is working with 16 districts this fall to develop or strengthen mentor programs across Texas.

As of mid-October, nearly 400 district leaders, school administrators, and teachers have gone through the initial NIET mentor training. Consistent with NIET's holistic approach, district and school administrators are participating in the training alongside mentor teachers to ensure a common language is adopted within districts and to develop a systemwide culture that will sustain the mentor program beyond the TEA allocation. With each district having adopted different COVID protocols for fall 2020, training has been delivered through both high-quality virtual live-streamed training as well as face-to-face workshops.

MPA districts are focused this fall on first designing structures for mentorship programs. This looks like transforming traditional mentoring programs into instructionally focused, capacity-building systems that provide mentors with ongoing support as they, in turn, support novice teachers. NIET's work starts with the development of a clear understanding of what it means to be a mentor, defining the characteristics of high-quality mentoring, and utilizing adult learning theory to build trust and support for beginning teachers. Mentors are also trained to understand critical concepts such as the core elements of data-driven instructional coaching and how to apply those in practice.

All of this work is aligned to Texas standards and the use of the T-TESS as an instructional tool — supporting TEA's



The Texas team — gathered here on a Zoom team meeting — doubled in size this year, led by Texas Director Jodi Leckbee Chan.

broader initiatives. The MPA is designed to help new teachers rapidly improve their classroom practice, leading to student success and greater job satisfaction and retention. Long-term, mentor-based ongoing support for new teachers will not only make it more likely that first-year teachers are successful and stay in the profession, but it also creates teacher leadership opportunities, which research has shown to be effective at improving student outcomes and improving retention rates. At the end of the day, these skills will benefit new and mentor teachers directly as well as build the capacity of instructional leaders across the school to improve teaching and learning.

NIET's partnership with TEA exemplifies how a state agency can be a leader in supporting key levers that promote educator effectiveness and retention — and it serves as a model for how leaders can create and sustain impactful systems in districts and schools.



400

number of district leaders, school administrators, and teachers who have gone through the initial NIET mentor training as of mid-October

New NIET Services

PREPARE ASPIRING TEACHERS

NIET Aspiring Teacher Rubric

NIET's higher education partners have often worked with NIET to tailor their approach to preparation, and this year, NIET worked with educator preparation programs to design the *NIET Aspiring Teacher Rubric*. The *Aspiring Teacher Rubric* provides a streamlined set of performance indicators most commonly used from campus to campus and adds refinements tailored to the aspiring teacher audience, including specific language surrounding curriculum, assessment, and descriptors of all five performance levels.

The 12 indicators, which are based on and aligned to NIET's *Teaching Standards Rubric*, describe the key skills and abilities that aspiring teachers must have to be prepared for the classroom.

1. Instructional plans
2. Assessment
3. Standards and objectives
4. Presenting instructional content
5. Activities and materials
6. Questioning
7. Academic feedback
8. Teacher knowledge of students
9. Thinking and problem-solving
10. Environment
11. Engaging students and managing behavior
12. Professionalism and ethical behavior

The *NIET Aspiring Teacher Rubric* is currently being piloted at Northern Arizona University and Marian University in Indianapolis.

EMPOWER PRINCIPALS

You can see what exemplary looks like with concrete indicators and descriptors. I have always said that if educators know what it looks like, they can replicate it. It is the same for leaders. When we know what all of the elements of success look like, we can attain it.

Michele M. Smith, principal/director of learning at Pierceton Elementary School in Whitko Community Schools, Indiana

NIET Principal Standards Rubric

Research and experience continue to point to the school leader as the critical player in establishing a collaborative school culture that is focused on strong instruction. To support principals' growth and skill development, NIET has outlined a set of research-based indicators that define excellence in school leadership. This *Principal Standards Rubric* helps principals to develop an in-depth understanding of expectations across six domains that maximize their role as instructional leaders.

1. School mission, vision, and strategic goal-setting
2. Instructional leadership
3. Capacity building
4. School environment/community and campus climate
5. Ethics and integrity
6. School operations/management

The rubric serves as a tool for

ADVANCE DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

leadership coaching, support, and evaluation. Principals gain access to complementary support in the EE PASS portal, including online resources, videos, training modules, and evaluator certification.

"The *NIET Principal Standards Rubric* allows for conversation about leadership, student achievement, and other areas that impact school success," said Michele M. Smith, who piloted the rubric in Whitko Community Schools, Indiana. "It also provides specific actions to foster growth and success. You can see what exemplary looks like with concrete indicators and descriptors. I have always said that if educators know what it looks like, they can replicate it. It is the same for leaders. When we know what all of the elements of success look like, we can attain it."



NIET West Director Patti Cruz, seen here at the start of the 2019-20 school year at Wildflower Accelerated Academy in Goodyear, Ariz., has worked with higher education institutions to support the development and pilot of the new *NIET Aspiring Teacher Rubric*.

Principal Leadership Series

NIET's Principal Leadership Series supports principals in growing their capacity as an effective school leader. The multi-day training series is focused on three areas:

1. **Creating and communicating a culture of equity**
2. **Building shared instructional leadership**
3. **Sustaining reflective practice through continuous improvement and coaching**

Collectively, these sessions develop essential mindsets and skills that empower principals to build a culture that is continuously focused on advancing instructional practices and improving outcomes for all students.

Building District Instructional Leadership

When superintendents and district administrators are equipped to be instructional leaders and receive coaching that helps them develop their skills, they can drive districtwide improvement. NIET works with superintendents and district teams to build out an action

plan rooted in contextual analysis and strengths, with the option for continuing guidance and coaching. This service includes:

1. **Contextual analysis**
2. **On-site support (root-cause analysis and action planning)**
3. **Continuing guidance**

The support is based on the NIET District Instructional Framework, which is aligned to NIET's *Teaching Standards Rubric* and *Principal Standards Rubric* with a focus on high-quality leadership practices and principles.

Consulting and Support Services

NIET provides consulting in other areas, which include:

1. **Providing support throughout the 2020-21 school year and preparing for 2021-22**
2. **Addressing unfinished learning**
3. **Supporting district-wide strategic planning**
4. **Implementing new curriculum and content**
5. **Embedding academic standards into high-quality teaching**

WE BELIEVE EFFECTIVE LEADERS MUST:

1

Establish, communicate, and activate a compelling **vision of excellence**

2

Prioritize and create **instructional coherence** across standards, curriculum, classroom practice, assessment, and evaluation and feedback

3

Develop a culture of **high expectations and equitable opportunities**

4

Build the capacity of others through a system of continuous learning, data analysis, and coaching

5

Model **integrity** and build **trust**



RESULTS AND EVIDENCE

NIET's partners are continuing to show success, no matter the learning environment. This spring, NIET was able to surprise long-time partner Duplessis Primary School in Ascension Parish, Louisiana, with the 2020 Founder's Award. Duplessis Primary has built a teacher leadership pipeline that is helping students to meet and exceed benchmarks, becoming a top gains honoree on the Louisiana state report card.

Recognizing and Rewarding Excellence

2020 Founder's Award

Each year, NIET recognizes five schools as finalists for the Founder's Award and recipients of \$10,000 — with one school receiving the title and \$50,000. Founder's Award recipients are selected by NIET based on their efforts to make instructional excellence the cornerstone of school improvement.

Founder's Award finalists are traditionally celebrated at our National Conference. In a sign of the times, this year we recognized the finalists via Zoom and then announced the winner: Duplessis Primary School in Ascension Public Schools! It is a testament to the leadership and staff of these five schools that the sense of pride, community, and celebration was just as strong virtually as it would have been in-person.

2020 Founder's Award Winner: Duplessis Primary School, Louisiana

For the past four years at Duplessis Primary School, teachers and leaders have worked with NIET to build a truly collaborative environment. This foundational support and the unifying motto of "The Patriot Way" have helped Duplessis students — of whom half are minority and 61% are economically disadvantaged — excel. On the most recent

Since Duplessis became an NIET partner school, we have continued to grow every single year.

Principal Jennifer Board

DUPLESSIS PRIMARY SCHOOL



Louisiana state exam, students' academic index score increased from 62.5 in third grade English language arts to 89.5 in fourth grade. In social studies, teachers grew those same students from 45.5 in third grade to 64 in fourth grade. Overall, Duplessis achieved a state letter grade of "B" in 2018 and 2019, and during the same time, the school earned an "A" in student progress.

"Fidelity to the NIET framework is the key to our success," said Principal Jennifer Board. "We are a highly reflective culture. Without the framework, we wouldn't be where we are. Since Duplessis became an NIET partner school, we have continued to grow every single year."

2020 FOUNDER'S AWARD FINALISTS

Chinle Elementary School, Arizona

Chinle Elementary is located at the heart of the Navajo Nation in northeastern Arizona. When NIET first partnered with the district in 2011, Chinle Elementary was identified as a Focus School with a letter grade of "D." Now campus leaders and coaches, with support from NIET specialists, discuss and refine practices, facilitating conversations that raise expectations for both teachers and students. Student performance data shows this regular support has had significant positive outcomes. Chinle Elementary earned a "B" in 2019 and was just shy of an "A." Since the introduction of Arizona's new statewide assessment in 2015, students in grades 3 through 6 have increased their passing rate for English language arts by 31 percentage points and in math by 24 percentage points. Across the district, students' growth has propelled the Chinle Unified School District from one of the lowest-performing to the highest-performing reservation district in the state.

Desert View Elementary School, Arizona

Desert View's campus sits along the U.S./ Mexico border, with a nearly 100% Hispanic/ Latino population and more than a third of its students classified as English language learners. The school, in its ninth year of working with NIET, uses the TAP System as a tool for establishing a consistency in structure and follow-up support as well as for differentiating instruction. This focus has led to the school's fifth straight "A" rating from the state. In 2019, Desert View earned a spot in the top 5% in the state for the percentage of students passing AzMERIT and in the top 10% of growth. From 2015 to 2019, students consistently achieved more than a year's worth of academic

CHINLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



DESERT VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



SLATON HIGH SCHOOL



growth. Teachers, in addition to students, thrive at Desert View. Many have advanced through leadership opportunities, creating a continuous pipeline of talent from the community.

“All of this [support] has made me a better leader,” Principal Meredith Nelson said. “I hold all accountable, especially myself. Our motto is: ‘The Race for Excellence Has No Finish Line.’ We live that every day.”

Slaton High School, Texas

Since starting full implementation of the TAP System in 2018-19, teachers and leaders in Slaton High School have worked together as a cohesive and communicative unit with a focus on supporting student growth and achievement. Teachers have started teaming up to analyze assessment data and develop plans to target support for students who repeatedly fail, helping students to take ownership over their learning. As a result of these refinements, the school has seen improved performance on state exams and improved state accountability ratings, and has expanded the number of students leaving Slaton High School with industry-based certifications and college credit hours. Slaton High received a state designation for outstanding academic growth in 2019. Slaton’s district partnership with Texas Tech has allowed Slaton High to grow its own pipeline of leadership and attract new teachers.

SLAUGHTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Slaughter Elementary School, Louisiana

Through NIET support structures adopted in the 2017-18 school year, students at Slaughter Elementary School — of whom about 60% are economically disadvantaged — are making gains. Teachers know they are supported by a leadership team that is able to tailor support for success, and students are supported in taking ownership of their learning and individual growth. Between 2018 and 2019, third-grade students increased their ELA index score from 65.4 to 94.5. Within the same time frame, fourth-grade students moved their ELA index up from 65.4 to 88.6. Students with disabilities improved their index by 10.7 points. Slaughter Elementary received a “B” state letter grade in 2018 and 2019 and an “A” for student progress.

“Students began taking ownership of their learning and individual growth and displayed confidence in their mastery of grade-level standards and daily objectives,” Principal Kimberly Glascock said. “Master Teacher Jennifer Thornton was paid the biggest compliment when a parent said, ‘My child likes doing math again.’”



Sarah Moore Greene Principal Robin Curry joined her leadership team to accept the 2020 School of Promise event during the celebration this fall.

Showing Promise

Recipients of the \$5,000 NIET School of Promise Award are selected by NIET based on their early progress and success after starting a partnership and renewing efforts to improve teaching and learning. Two schools were honored this fall to celebrate both the gains made so far and the spirit of collaboration and innovation that educators have modeled through the transition and shifts required to respond to COVID-19.

Sarah Moore Greene Magnet Academy, Tennessee

Sarah Moore Greene is an elementary magnet school in Knoxville, Tenn., that serves almost 600 students, about 75% of whom are African American and about 80% of whom are considered economically disadvantaged. Sarah Moore Greene began partnering with NIET in fall 2018, and educators receive ongoing support from NIET specialists each month. Now, educators have improved student achievement and growth through implementing a new focus on job-embedded coaching and instructional excellence.

Sarah Moore Greene has embraced a culture of data-driven collaboration, and school leaders have made ongoing investments in professional learning and coaching for teachers. After consecutive years of level 1 growth, Sarah Moore Greene earned level 5 in 2019, the highest rating in the state. By prioritizing teacher and student needs, they have shown that incredible growth is possible when educators are united around a common language and goals.

Mellichamp Elementary, South Carolina

Mellichamp is among 32 schools in the Orangeburg County School District and has the highest poverty rate, at 91.5%. Since partnering with NIET in 2018-19, Mellichamp has shifted its school culture to intentionally invest in its educators and re-focus on data-driven decisions and high-quality instructional practices. Educators regularly collaborate and have a chance to grow as instructors, and that culture contributed to the school retaining all of its teachers between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.



Former Mellichamp Elementary Principal Hayward Jean, now director of student services for Orangeburg County School District, dropped by to celebrate their award.

Further bolstering opportunities for teacher and student success, Mellichamp has developed partnerships with nearby Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Claflin University and South Carolina State University. These shifts in culture and practice, plus community partnerships, have led to improvements in the state measures of Academic Achievement, Preparing for Success, and Student Engagement. From 2018 to 2019, the school also increased its percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on state assessments in English language arts, math, science, and social studies.

The Power of a Long-term Commitment to Effective Teaching

DESOTO PARISH SCHOOLS, LOUISIANA

The District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness honors school districts that have focused on supporting excellent instruction and improving student performance. The 2019-20 year marked the second time that NIET has given the recognition and \$50,000 award.

What Sets DeSoto Apart

DeSoto's longstanding commitment to instructional excellence, across several leadership transitions, shows the power of an investment in human capital and dedication to maintaining that focus. DeSoto Parish Schools, located in northwest Louisiana, has more than 5,000 students across 10 schools, and about 60% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. In 2008, DeSoto recommitted to increasing teacher quality by partnering with NIET to implement the TAP System. At the time, student success was lagging. The district's graduation rate in 2008-09 was 67.8%, and in 2010 the district was ranked No. 45 in the state. As in many districts, educators said that there was unproductive intra-district competition and teaching was often happening in isolation.

The DeSoto-NIET partnership has placed teacher leaders at the forefront of improvement. Teacher leaders are coached and supported in their use of evidence-based tools and strategies that strengthen instructional practice. Now, teacher leaders are responsible for leading their peers through professional learning, and everyone in the district, from the leadership team to the students themselves, is responsible for monitoring and increasing growth and success. As a result, DeSoto has



Our partnership with NIET really engages teachers in a highly collaborative, professional yet competitive environment that promotes educator effectiveness. Everything we do revolves around outcomes for students and opportunities to improve for teachers.

Clay Corley, superintendent for DeSoto Parish Schools

seen noticeable increases in student achievement. Among the highlights:

- In 2016, DeSoto earned its **first-ever "A" rating** from the state.
- In 2019, its **graduation rate was 92.9%** — well above state and national averages.
- On the district performance scores released in 2019, DeSoto ranked **No. 12 overall in the state.**
- On the 2019 LEAP test, DeSoto Parish was in the **top 10 most improved school systems** in the state across all grades and subjects.

DeSoto's transformation demonstrates the power of high-quality teaching practices and how a true commitment to excellent teaching can overcome barriers. Throughout the past several months, DeSoto has also shown the power of having strong systems like these in place. Leaders have navigated COVID-19 through leveraging strong communication channels and using networks of teacher and school leaders to provide training and coaching. While their continuous growth mindset is looking toward the next step they can take, they have been able to move forward together and keep the focus on student learning.

LIFTing Up Effective Leaders

Creating the pathway to leadership is an inherent part of NIET's approach in building teacher leaders. While NIET's 75 partnerships with educator preparation programs often focus on equipping classroom teachers, a recent federal grant partnership with Texas Tech University (TTU) exemplifies how NIET can work with higher education to elevate and enhance programs to train school leaders effectively.

NIET and TTU partnered with 12 high-need districts through a federal Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant to create the Leadership Instruction for Teachers (LIFT) program. Through LIFT, which Texas Tech has continued even after the grant ended this year, aspiring school leaders enroll in the educational leadership program at TTU and are embedded as "principal fellows" in high-need school districts. This enables them to take the classroom instruction received at TTU and implement it in real-life circumstances with the supervision, evaluation, feedback, and guidance of an effective, experienced school leader. The process provides authentic training, where theoretical learning is implemented and skills honed with expert mentors on-site, as well as ongoing TTU academic support.

Establishing a high-quality leadership

This partnership has helped the district grow and hire campus leaders who can lead by example and empower others to create success for all students.

Patricia Lewis, associate superintendent in Grand Prairie ISD

pipeline takes districts' ability to drive systemwide effectiveness to the next level. "Grand Prairie ISD's work with NIET and TTU has helped us grow as a district in growing our own leaders," said Patricia Lewis, associate superintendent in Grand Prairie ISD. "Our most effective leaders serve as principal mentors and leadership coaches. This partnership has helped the district grow and hire campus leaders who can lead by example and empower others to create success for all students."

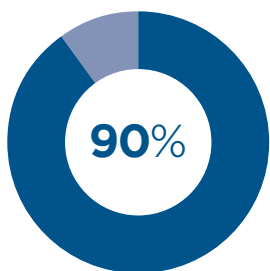
The impact of this program has been tracked in three areas: leadership competency, program satisfaction, and post-graduate placement. The results are powerful.

Historically, school leadership programs have been criticized for their disconnect between what is taught in class and what leaders actually need. However, the job-embedded learning of the TTU-NIET partnership

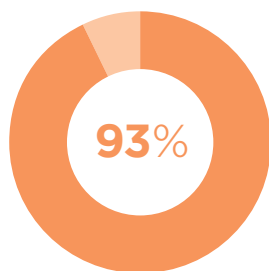
resulted in fellows demonstrating improvements in all areas assessed using the Texas principal evaluation rubrics. Over 90% of principal fellows reported they felt "job-ready" following their in-school residency, while 93% rated their experience as good or excellent.

Most impactful: 87% obtained a leadership position within a year of graduation, and 80% of participants were hired to work in high-need schools.

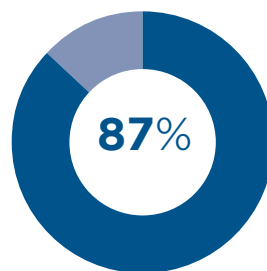
Growing leadership is often seen as a back-burner priority, but too often that results in the least prepared principals being placed in the schools that most need effective leaders. However, the NIET-TTU partnership shows how investing in hands-on, expert training can create a pipeline of talented leaders who can improve the educational experience for students in some of Texas' most challenged districts — and it has proven to be a model other institutions can follow.



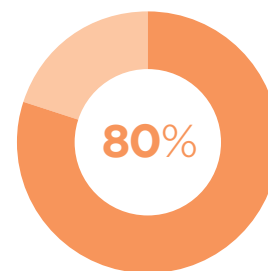
Percent of principal fellows who **reported they felt "job-ready"** following their in-school residency



Percent of principal fellows who rated their experience as **good or excellent**



Percent of principal fellows who **obtained a leadership position** within a year of graduation



Percent of principal fellows who were **hired to work in high-need schools** within a year of graduation



NIET Louisiana Director Dr. Davita Lancelin coached leaders in East Feliciana last school year.

The Impact of LA BOLD: East Feliciana Public Schools

The Louisiana Building on Leadership Development (LA BOLD) project has created a coalition of high-need districts and schools working with NIET to increase equitable access to effective educators for students in high poverty schools. Funded through a 5-year 2016 federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant, NIET is providing leadership support and training across five public school districts — DeSoto, East Feliciana, Madison, Rapides, and St. John the Baptist — as well as six Orleans Parish charter schools.

East Feliciana exemplifies the impact this initiative has had. Located in rural Clinton, La., East Feliciana Parish has six schools and enrolls roughly 1,800 students. Of those, 62% are students of color and nearly 90% are economically disadvantaged. For years, the district has been plagued by high teacher turnover, ineffective instruction, and the inability to attract candidates from outside the area. Most of the neighboring parishes offer higher salaries.

LA BOLD has opened the door for

opportunity in East Feliciana. The community has welcomed NIET's partnership and has implemented policies and practices focused on developing teachers' instructional skills, tied to performance evaluation and compensation within each campus. Unique to East Feliciana is their motivation to build districtwide systems to ensure best practices are sustained beyond the tenure of the grant, or any one school or district leader. In this vein, the district piloted NIET's new Principal Leadership Series training and Building District Instructional Leadership services (see page 24) and set up principal professional learning groups focused on data-driven decision-making based on their own student and teacher performance. They also provided one-on-one principal support to ensure that school leaders were fully trained on providing feedback to their teacher leaders, including having competencies around the newly adopted high-quality Tier 1 curriculum.

This districtwide approach to developing instructional leadership



takes time, but East Feliciana Superintendent Keisha Netterville is investing in her school leaders to ensure that all students succeed: "We made the change to support principals because we needed to make sure that school leaders were equipped to support the teachers on their campus, leading to increased student achievement." And the needle is starting to move. Teacher retention rates are improving, a pipeline of leaders within the district is developing, and students are showing upward momentum in increasing their mastery. East Feliciana's work is far from complete, but their partnership with NIET through the LA BOLD grant is putting educators and students on the path toward sustainable success.

High-quality Curriculum Matters — Especially Right Now

Even the best teachers find it hard to push students to master state standards without a curriculum that supports them. This is especially true for teachers working with students who need extra support to access grade-level expectations, and educators often spend hours of their time each week looking for better texts, activities, and materials to make up the gap. But a new curriculum by itself is not the solution, and many teachers struggle to use a new curriculum that is introduced with little embedded professional development for teachers or buy-in from leaders to make it effective.

Together with our partners, NIET is developing a better way forward that blends the “what” to teach with “how” to teach it. NIET schools are proving that it’s not just possible to strengthen both curriculum and instruction at the same time but that it is necessary to do so. In June, we shared our findings in *High-quality Curriculum Implementation: Connecting What to Teach with How to Teach It*.

Here are a few takeaways we think are important to highlight from that work. The findings are particularly relevant as educators identify individual student learning gaps created by the challenges of COVID-19 and plan how to address them.

High-quality Curriculum Is a Tool to Increase Equity

Because high-quality curriculum — a standards-aligned curriculum that provides a scope and sequence along with questions and materials that increase students’ depth of knowledge — is rich in content, instructional expertise is key.

Without high-quality instructional

Using high-quality curricula is key to helping our students think in a more complex way and access the type of reading, writing, computing, and problem-solving they will face in college and beyond. We need to prepare our students for that.

Faydra Alexander, director of leadership development in the Algiers Charter in New Orleans

materials, students are not challenged to work at a higher level and often waste time on irrelevant or disconnected activities and assignments. “Using high-quality curricula is key to helping our students think in a more complex way and access the type of reading, writing, computing, and problem-solving they will face in college and beyond,” said Faydra Alexander, director of leadership development in the Algiers Charter in New Orleans. “We need to prepare our students for that.”

Maximize the Potential of a High-quality Curriculum

Identifying and selecting a high-quality curriculum is the first step, but implementing it well is just as important. School leaders have to create a professional learning environment where educators are always talking about, planning, and using the curriculum. This requires teamwork at every level of the system, from district administrators to teachers, and intentionality to marry curriculum with instruction. Success also involves communicating to parents the new expectations

embedded in the curriculum and supporting them to reinforce their child’s learning at home.

Blending Curriculum and Instructional Support: Lessons Learned

For 20 years, NIET has worked with district partners in connecting what to teach with how to teach it well, and this requires professional learning grounded in the content.

Katrina Harris — a fourth-grade teacher at Queensborough Leadership Academy in Caddo Parish Public Schools, a high-poverty district located in northwest Louisiana — knows firsthand the power of combining these supports. “It’s about taking the intended curriculum activities and understanding the alignment among the learning objectives, standards, and assessment, and then making instructional decisions that help students to reach the learning goal,” Harris said. “When coaching and support for curriculum and pedagogy are done together, it makes more sense to a teacher. It doesn’t feel like two separate decisions; it feels like one.



Executive Master Teacher Dr. Marvin Rainey led a discussion with the instructional leadership team at Queensborough Leadership Academy, which has been a leader in the transition to Tier 1 materials.

You may not label them as ‘curriculum’ or ‘pedagogy,’ but you intuitively understand it’s good teaching.”

Here are our lessons learned:

1. Focus on **leaders first**.
2. Create time, structures, and formal roles for **ongoing, collaborative professional learning** at the school level.
3. Adopt a **research-based, instructional rubric** to guide conversations around teaching and learning with the curriculum.
4. Anchor **coaching and feedback** in the curriculum.
5. Recognize the **stages of curriculum implementation** and what teachers need to progress to higher levels.
6. Ensure that districts **work closely with school leaders** to plan for, communicate, and implement school-based professional learning that blends support for curriculum and instructional practice.

The use of a high-quality curriculum is a powerful foundation for improvements in teaching and learning, and it represents an especially important opportunity for low-income students and students of color to have access to challenging, grade-level work. Read the full report on NIET’s website at bit.ly/NIETCurriculumPaper.



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Katrina Harris (above), fourth-grade teacher at Queensborough Leadership Academy in Caddo Parish Public Schools

SAVE THE DATE

NIET's 2021 National Conference

Next Level Learning | March 3-5

Our 2021 conference will be entirely virtual, given the continued challenges and uncertainty the COVID-19 pandemic presents, and NIET is designing our event with that reality in mind. The conference will offer participants the opportunity to participate in sessions that are focused on the immediate needs teachers and leaders face and help them transform their instruction and leadership practices to reach the next stage — no matter where they are now. NIET specialists will provide educators with strategies and practical tools for virtual, in-person, and hybrid learning environments and engage with participants in interactive workshops on key topics:

- ▶ **Connecting the Dots Between Curriculum and Instruction**
- ▶ **The Leader as the Lead Learner**
- ▶ **Maximizing Student Ownership of Learning — Whether In-Person or Virtual**
- ▶ **Coaching as the Game-changer**
- ▶ **Raising the Bar for Teacher Preparation**
- ▶ **Planning, Teaching, and Assessing with the Learner in Mind**

To learn more and register, visit NIET.org

