

# Recognizing and Celebrating Excellence

Each year, we recognize great teachers and leaders at our national conference through the NIET District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness and the NIET Founder’s Award. These surprise awards celebrate success in strengthening classroom teaching and student outcomes.

## 2022 Founder’s Award Grand Prize Winner

### Cross County High School

Cross County High School exemplifies NIET’s work with schools to develop teacher leaders, collaborate on successful instructional practices, and provide feedback and support to address teacher and student needs. As recognition of their commitment to these best practices, Cross County High School was awarded the 2022 NIET Founder’s Award and its \$50,000 grand prize.

Cross County High School serves 300 students, all of whom receive free or reduced-price lunch benefits. The school is one of only two schools in the Cross County School District, a small, rural community located about an hour south of Jonesboro, Arkansas. Principal Stephen Prince and his leadership team have delved deeply into NIET’s TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement to develop a collaboration structure that builds teachers’ skill sets and addresses the educational inequities and challenges of serving a rural community.

Implementing the TAP System has established consistent structures and processes that are yielding results. Regular meetings with educators, called cluster meetings, have provided a dedicated collaboration time for teachers to focus on students and their school-wide improvement goals. School leaders are using the *NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric* to create ongoing feedback for teachers,



highlighting areas that need refinement while also reinforcing teachers’ strengths. This ongoing coaching is leading to a significant improvement in instructional practices for the school. Like many schools across the country, recruiting and retaining effective teachers is a challenge for Cross County High; however, these strategies and levels of support have helped

the school increase its retention of effective teachers from 75% to 96% in only four years.

The implementation of these effective strategies improved Cross County High School’s graduation rate from 77% to 95% in only seven years. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Cross County School District is one of only a few districts in Arkansas to increase student performance from 2019 to 2021, and in 2021, Cross County High School students outperformed students statewide in all subjects. “For our small school and our small community, [NIET] has been a game changer for us,” said Prince. “The partnership came around at the best moment because we were looking to reform our school, support our teachers more, make them even more effective, grow our students, and help them achieve more.”

### Cross County High School students outperformed students statewide on the 2021 state assessments

