

Letter from the Founder

A great deal has been accomplished by the many partners of NIET since the pandemic caused schools to take most of learning online. We have seen districts and schools refine technology skills, transform rubrics and lessons for every modality, restructure teacher collaboration and feedback, and strengthen partnerships with students and families to promote ownership of learning. Yet while the education landscape has changed significantly as a result of the uncertainties of the pandemic, educator effectiveness remains constant, in fact, the guiding force that unifies schools around a clear vision. The courage and commitment of educators in all settings to not only stay the course, but exceed expectations is the greatest proof that striving to achieve excellence matters.

Excellence matters in schools whose leadership teams leverage skills, knowledge, and experiences across the faculty to address the specific needs of students and teachers. It has been gratifying to see educators remain ahead of the curve, thanks to NIET structures that allow time to plan, train, and collaborate in new environments. What's more, with professional learning grounded in student data and followed up with coaching in classrooms, educators have been well-positioned to pinpoint and meet needs in real time. Star Hardimon, principal of Indianapolis' Douglas MacArthur Elementary School when her staff received the 2021 NIET Founder's Award, credited their success to NIET structures at school and district levels. Conversations "lead to realistic solutions, growth, and learning," she said. Today, Star serves as director of elementary education under the leadership of Perry Township Schools Superintendent Pat Mapes,



broadening the impact in schools on teachers and students.

Excellence matters in districts whose leaders prioritize funding and support for educator effectiveness, establish a vision and expectations, and share best practices for everyone to grow. Led by Superintendent Dr. Saul Hinojosa, rural Somerset Independent School District, Texas, is a shining example of using these principles to drive meaningful, sustained improvements in student achievement. We honored educators and officials with the 2020-21 NIET District Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness for their long-standing work changing the trajectory of young people's lives. "Integrating teacher leaders works," Saul shared, "and the proof is in the results." Given all that the district has accomplished, it is no surprise that Somerset was one of the few Texas districts singled out for showing notable growth in last spring's state assessments.

Excellence matters in states that invest in and scale up practices that work. We greatly value collaborating with the state departments of education in Louisiana and South Carolina on teacher training. State teacher mentoring programs have extended NIET's reach in Louisiana

and Texas. The Texas Incentive Allotment and Resilient Schools Support Program have generated new partnerships to build educator capacity and increase student achievement growth.

Excellence matters in national efforts that place a strategic focus on teacher leadership and support. Stimulus funds provide a powerful opportunity to support and retain effective educators and accelerate student learning. NIET partnerships funded by the Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program and Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) Grant Program — now in Texas and South Carolina — make it possible to attract and develop larger numbers of educators to prepare students for success. This success serves as a model for others.

These are a few examples highlighted in this report, representing innovations that inspire us daily. I encourage you to consider how they can influence your work in your pursuit in building educator excellence and advancing student learning.

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