



ANNUAL REPORT 2021





Table of Contents

NIET IN 2021

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Letter from Our Presidents..... | 4 |
| Letter from the Founder | 6 |
| Who We Are | 7 |

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| By the Numbers | 13 |
| Virtually Together in 2021..... | 14 |
| Founder’s Award Finalists..... | 15 |

LEAD LEARNERS

| | |
|--|----|
| Leader to Learn From: Quincy Natay..... | 19 |
| Somerset ISD Students Outperform Their Peers | 20 |
| Strengthening Our Standards | 21 |
| Designing and Sharing Resources to Support More Educators | 22 |
| How Support for School Leaders Should Change | 24 |
| Why New Teacher Mentoring Falls Short, and How to Fix It..... | 25 |

CONTINUING TO ACCELERATE

| | |
|---|------------|
| The Power of Teacher Leadership..... | 27 |
| Expanding Our Partnerships: Updates on Key Innovations..... | 28 |
| Supporting State Leaders to Train Teachers | 30 |
| Leveraging Teacher Leadership to Accelerate Learning in Indiana..... | 32 |
| Investing in Innovation..... | 33 |
| Advancing Innovations to Support Aspiring Teachers | 35 |
| Join Us in 2022!..... | Back cover |

Letter from Our Presidents

NIET Partners and Leaders,

In many ways, 2021 brought out the best in NIET. Even though the last 12 months have been more challenging than perhaps many could have anticipated this time last year, we have seen incredible resilience in both our team and our partners, specifically district leaders, school leaders, teachers, and students. Across NIET, we pushed ourselves to learn more each day and reach the next level of excellence, and we find ourselves now even more optimistic about what is possible.

At the NIET all-staff retreat this summer, we cemented a new core value for our organization: Agility. This value is built on a principle NIET has always aspired to exemplify, in that we provide partners with tailored support that is based on educators' strengths and areas of growth. Further, our coaching and training are designed to equip leaders to meet their goals — whether for their state, university, district, school, or classroom. Agility is inherent in our support. But over the past year, as modalities and priorities changed and changed again, we have seen our team rise to meet that core value in every way. (See more about our core values on page 11.) The quality and passion of our team have always been the difference-maker in who we are, and as we have grown to take on new opportunities to work with additional teachers and leaders across more schools and districts, we have deepened our expertise and our ability to meet educators' needs. We are more ready than ever for what the future holds.

As we look ahead to 2022, agility will continue to be at the heart of our conversations with partners. The start of this school year looked all too similar to what we saw last fall,



Across NIET, we pushed ourselves to learn more each day and reach the next level of excellence, and we find ourselves now even more optimistic about what is possible.

and we know education leaders are working every day to make the next right decision. None of us can predict the new and continued challenges that may come our way, but we do know NIET will be with you each step of the way and can help you be successful, even in the unknown. This Annual Report highlights a few reasons why:

- We have more partnerships and opportunities to innovate new strategies and address the needs of every student (page 13).
- We have increased our focus on student engagement and ownership, including through strengthening some of our foundational resources (page 21).
- We have more resources than ever, including many available publicly for educators to access easily (page 22).
- Many of our partners saw student

achievement growth in 2021, exceeding national trends (example on page 20).

- We've learned more about how to strengthen key aspects of the educator pipeline, including support for principals (page 24) and new teachers (page 25).
- We have new resources to support aspiring teachers and higher education partners (page 35).

We always welcome your feedback and ideas about what educators and schools need most in this moment, and we will do everything we can to provide that support. You can reach out to both of us at president@niet.org or individually, jbarnett@niet.org or lencalade@niet.org.

Best,

Josh Barnett & Laura Encalade



This summer, the full NIET team was able to gather together in person for the first time since 2019. While our previous meeting gathered 43 team members, the size of the NIET team more than doubled by our 2021 retreat, with 91 team members joining in person or virtually. This gave us a chance to get to know one another better and reset on the work ahead.

We are looking forward to being with our partners in person over the months ahead. Having a chance to reflect with leaders on the shifts they have seen in their teachers and in school-wide collaboration is always a powerful reminder about the impact this work can have. Hearing students share about what they are learning and why creates an environment of ownership that we want to see in every classroom.

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.

Lowell Milken

Lowell Milken



NIET Team Members

Over the past year, as NIET’s work expanded, we added more than 30 new team members to support our growing partnerships through the pandemic and beyond. NIET’s team includes a diverse set of educators who bring deep expertise and a variety of strengths.

Shelia Banks
 Julie Barbee
 Joshua Barnett
 Nicole Bevilacqua
 Melissa Blossom*
 Nicole Bolen
 Robbin Boudreaux
 Rachel Bradshaw*
 Teddy Broussard
 Jennifer Oliver Brady
 Bobbie Jo Bright*
 Julee Broscoff
 Angelina Burrows*
 Vicki Cabra*
 Shayla Canady*
 Kristina Carsow*
 Jodi Leckbee Chan
 Danielle Chretien*
 Sharon Cochrane*
 Vicky Condalary
 Matt Connor
 Robin Cornet*
 Bobby Cox
 Jill Crain

Angela Davis
 Scott Duncan*
 Laura Encalade
 Christina Faas
 Sherrie Fairchild-Keyes*
 Trey Forrester
 LaDazha Ford*
 Erin Foster
 Sara Gast
 Amy Gayle*
 Angela Griffis
 Kate Hall*
 Theresa Hamilton
 Michael Hegarty
 Kimberly Herring*
 Alisha Hinton*
 Pilar Holtrop
 Tanee Hudgens
 Brian Johnson*
 Sarah Jolly-Swift*
 Ruhi Khan*
 Tiffany Kelly*
 Angie Kendall*
 Kyle Kovach*

Stacy Knoop*
 Davita Lancelin
 Trevor Leutscher
 Handrea Logis
 Janice Mann
 Caroline Martin
 Abigail McKamey*
 Kelly Minick*
 Stephanie Mosqueda
 Chrissy Murphy*
 Dexter Murphy*
 Larry Murphy
 Claire Murray
 Rossette Osamba
 Lindsey Parker
 Keely Potter
 Patrice Pujol
 Carrie Pullins*
 Courtney Rayburn
 Elizabeth Rose*
 Paulette Rowell
 Hannah Rush
 Bekki Sarradet*
 Tad Savage*

Molly Sears
 Marina Serdiouk
 Ann Shaw
 Amber Simpson
 Tanjela Sims
 Kimberlyn Slagle*
 Hank Staggs
 Christa Stewart*
 Natalie Szakacs
 Sheila Talamo
 Laura Tew
 Kristan Van Hook
 Robin Variest*
 Lauren Waldow
 Matt Walsh*
 Amanda Warwick
 Devon Willis-Jones
 Chastity Wilson*
 Kevin Winters*
 Michelle Wolfenbarger
 Jennifer Woods
 Amy Wooten
 Sandra Walker-Parker*

* Designates new team member in 2021

Board Members

NIET's work is advised by a board of education leaders.

Lowell Milken
Founder and Chairman

Dr. Gary Stark
Vice Chairman

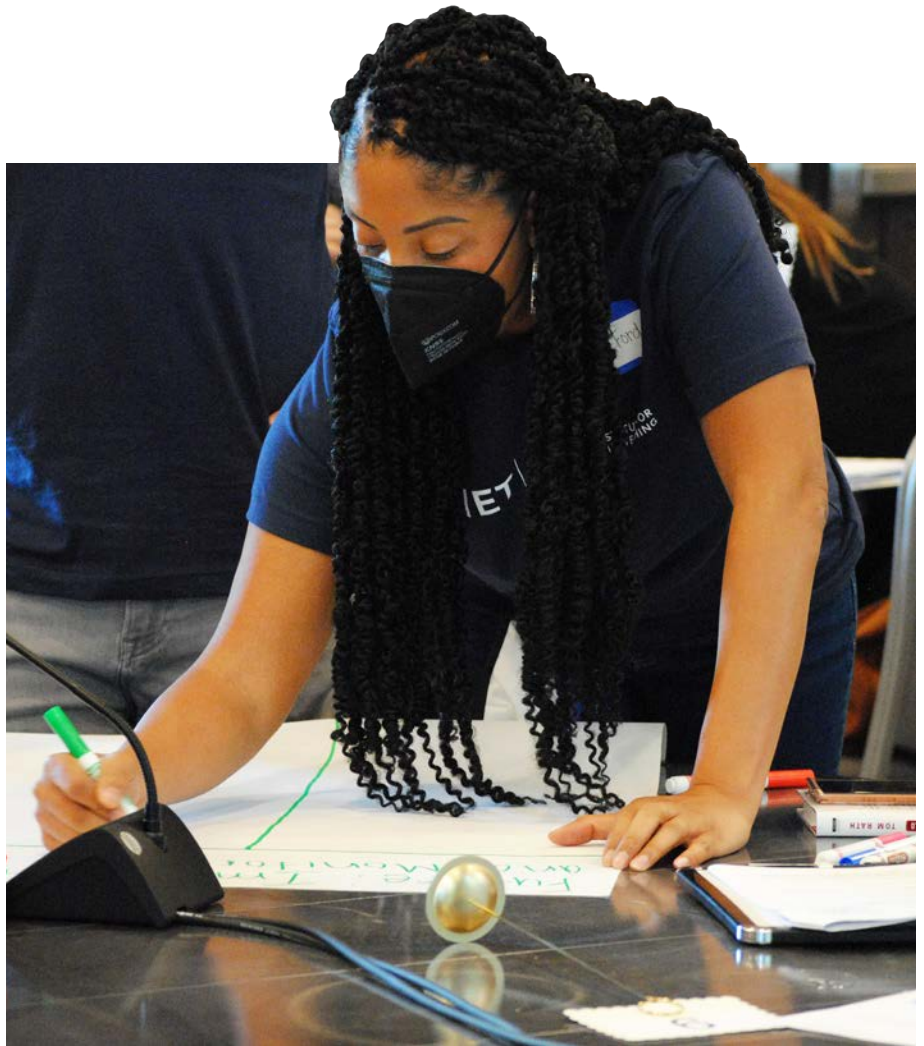
Ralph Finerman
Treasurer

Dr. Candice McQueen
Board Member

Dr. Ted Sanders
Board Member

Dr. James W. Guthrie
Board Member

Ray Simon
Board Member



NIET Steering Committee and Educator Advisory Board

NIET also brings together teachers and administrators from across the country to support NIET as it expands its work. The NIET Steering Committee and Educator Advisory Board inform NIET's work year-round to develop innovations and advance policies that have a direct impact on the classroom.

NIET Steering Committee

Bob Behning

Indiana State Representative and Director of External Affairs for Marian University Klipsch Educators College

Dr. Paula Summers Calderon

Dean, Southeastern Louisiana University College of Education

Dr. James Gray

Superintendent, Jefferson Parish Schools, Louisiana

Dr. Tonia Howard

Chief of Leadership Development and Special Programs, Lancaster Independent School District, Texas

Hayward Renel Jean

Director of Student Services, Orangeburg County School District, South Carolina

Lori Line

Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, Goshen Community Schools, Indiana

Patrick W. Mapes

Superintendent, Perry Township Schools, Indiana

Dr. Nathan Morris

Superintendent, Cross County School District, Arkansas

Julie Thompson

Executive Director of Elementary Education, Knox County Schools, Tennessee

Dr. Jennifer Tuttleton

Deputy Assistant Superintendent, Office of School System Relations, Louisiana Department of Education

Dr. Kenith Britt

Senior Vice President of Strategic Growth and Innovation, Marian University, Indiana

Dr. Saul Hinojosa

Superintendent, Somerset Independent School District, Texas

Dr. David Mathis

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

Educator Advisory Board

Dr. Chris Burkett

Gamecock EdQuarters Executive Director, University of South Carolina College of Education

Corrie Callahan

Master Teacher, Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, Indiana

Robert Hill

Head of School, Alice M. Harte Charter School, InspireNOLA, Louisiana

Dr. Araceli Montoya

Executive Director of Human Resources, Buckeye Elementary School District, Arizona

Lauren Moore

Master Teacher, West Goshen Elementary School, Indiana

Alex Patterson

Mentor Teacher, Dodson Branch School, Tennessee

Sarah Tomic

Teacher and Instructional Coach, Milken Educator, Pikes Peak Elementary School, Harrison School District, Colorado

Sheena Washington

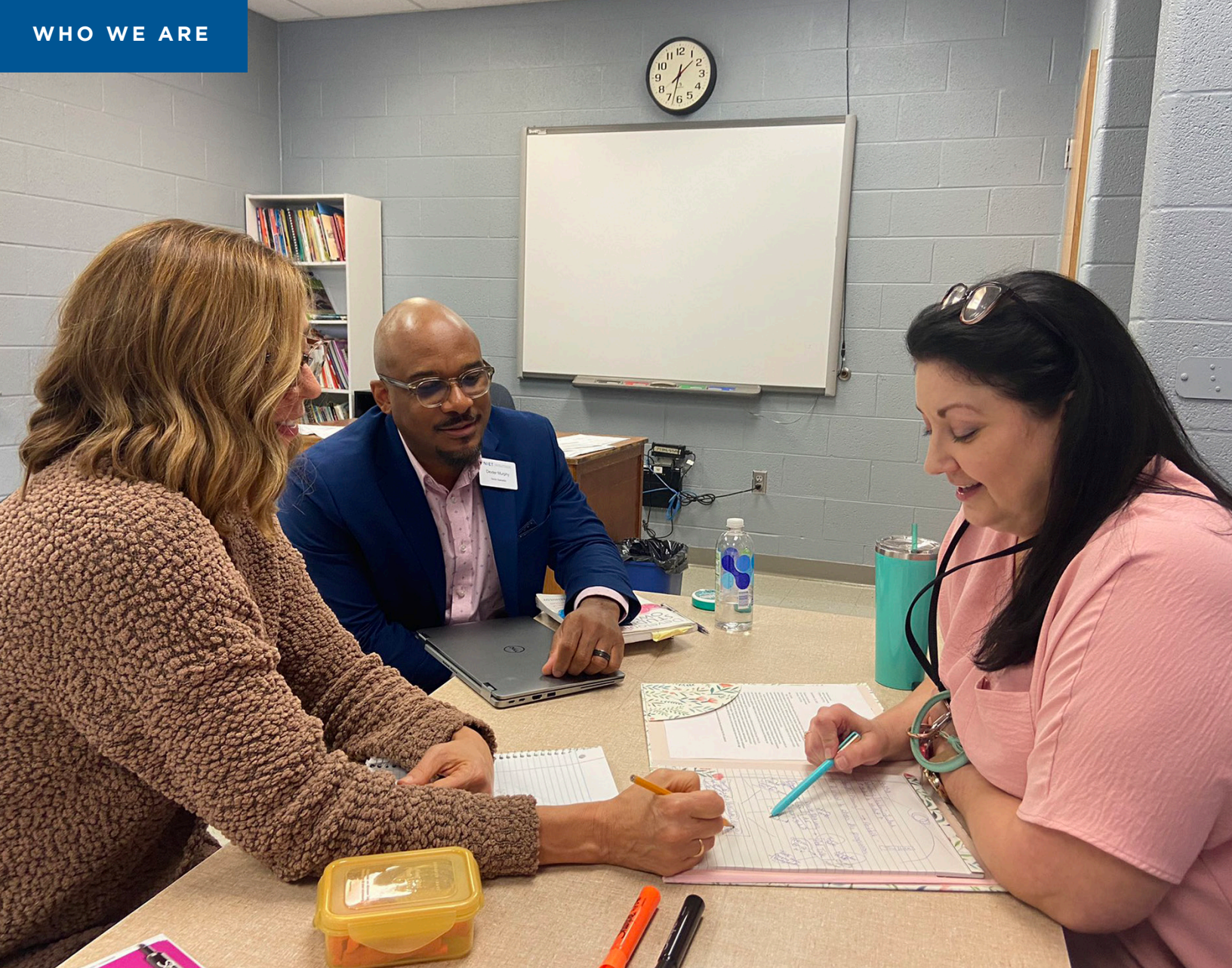
Social Studies Teacher, Teach Plus Fellow, International High School at Largo, Maryland

Amy Whittington

Pre-K-6 Principal, Central Decatur Community School District, Iowa

Christina Jamison

Assistant Principal, John Nance Garner Fine Arts Academy, Texas



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.

Core Values

NIET has established core values that are central to upholding our mission and vision and describe how we work with one another and our partners. This year, NIET added a fifth core value to capture a characteristic of our team that has always been present but was exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic: Agility. Over the course of 2021, everyone at NIET was continuously learning and adjusting to meet the needs of our partners and anticipate future support.



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.



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.



AGILITY

We know that it is important to be responsive to what is going on around us, from our partner needs to the priorities of the states in which we serve. This means we must listen, learn, flex, and customize to these needs as much as possible. As we respond, we must be able to think and move quickly and easily while ensuring we respond with evidence-based practices, with depth in professional learning, and in user-friendly modalities.

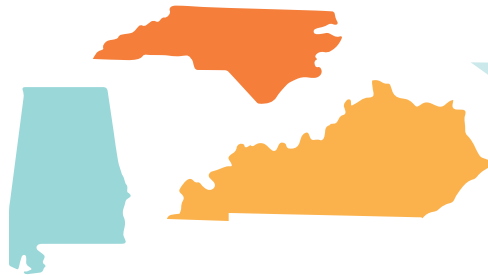
2021 HIGHLIGHTS



By the Numbers

39

New **NIET team members** who started in 2021



three

New states that NIET is supporting this year: North Carolina, Alabama, and Kentucky

6,500 **Days of service** NIET provided partners in 2020-21

90

K-12 **partners who are new to NIET** in 2021-22

11,000



Days of service NIET is planning with partners for **2021-22**

73

Free resources NIET has developed to support educators with virtual, hybrid, and learning acceleration needs in 2021-22



24

Higher education partners in 2021-22

7,075

Visits to the NIET.org/ resources page that NIET launched in April

4,585

Downloads of learning acceleration resources

1,033,667 **Twitter impressions** in 2020-21

Virtually Together in 2021



Just like educators, NIET had to teach and lead virtually this past year as our work continued to grow and expand. In addition to converting our on-site support and collaboration to Zoom, we also provided ways to gather and learn together as we redesigned our conference and summer institute to be online, creating a way for our partners across the country to engage and interact during the pandemic.

Ultimately, NIET hosted its largest ever national conference in 2021 — and it was entirely virtual. Almost 1,200 attendees joined during the event held March 3-5, and as a benefit of virtual, more than 100 chose to view the sessions later. The NIET National Conference featured

keynote addresses and conversations, including John Hattie, John King, and Natalie Wexler. The event centered on the theme of Next Level Learning, and educators were able to take sessions on tracks designed for teacher leaders, principals, and higher education officials. While there is never a substitute for an energized, packed ballroom full of educators, the virtual experience was still interactive and engaging, and the vast majority of participants reported taking away key learning and rated the conference highly.

This summer, NIET hosted its second National Summer Institute virtually, building off many of the takeaways from the national conference in structuring high-quality virtual training

experiences. Almost 500 educators gathered July 14-15 on NIET's online platform to take sessions focused on student ownership, digging into the updates to the *Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric*. Educators were able to take sessions with their school and district teams, who often gathered together and interacted virtually with NIET specialists and peers.

While we have learned a great deal about delivering live online learning, just like teachers, we are ready to get back to in-person as much as possible. Our 2022 National Conference in Dallas (see back cover) will offer a return to in-person collaboration. To learn more and register for the 2022 National Conference, visit NIET.org.

Founder's Award Finalists

Even with the unusual routines of the 2020-21 school year, one annual milestone for NIET stayed the same: celebrating great teachers and leaders at our national conference with the NIET Founder's Award.

Founder's Award recipients are selected by NIET based on their efforts to make instructional excellence the cornerstone of school improvement, plan for regular professional learning focused on real-time needs of

teachers and students, create a culture of collaboration and reflection, and leverage teacher leaders and administrators to drive student growth.

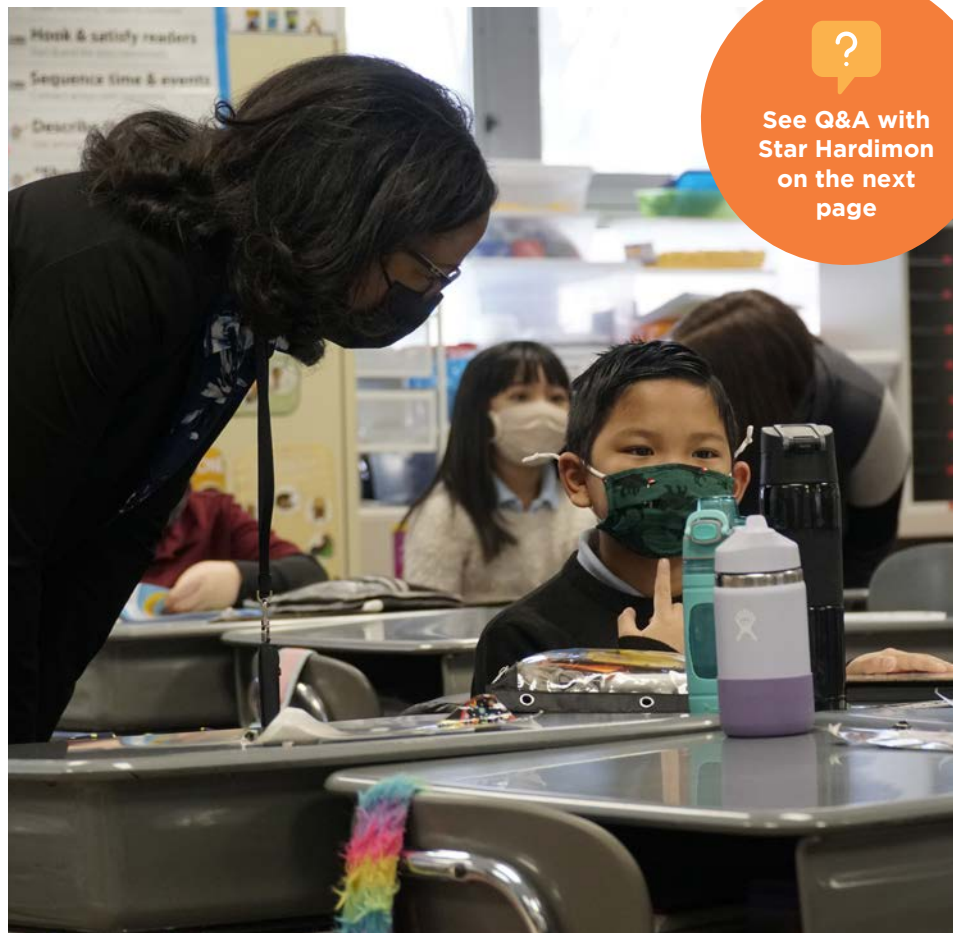
This year's Founder's Award finalists showed they continued to prioritize instructional excellence to improve student achievement as they adapted to virtual instruction and the challenges of the pandemic by continuing to support their school community. Their stories were a highlight in our year.

2021 Founder's Award \$50,000 Grand Prize Winner

**Douglas MacArthur
Elementary School,**
Perry Township Schools, Indiana

Star Hardimon, who was principal at Douglas MacArthur before transitioning to a district leadership role this fall, credits school and district support for helping her lead Douglas MacArthur to an A state rating through developing her teachers as learners, challenging their thinking, continuously analyzing data, and getting results. Douglas MacArthur, like schools across Perry Township, has experienced a significant shift in demographics due to an influx of refugees, mostly from Myanmar. The school's English Language Learner student population has increased from 24% to over 50%, and its eligibility of students for free or reduced-price lunch has jumped from 53% to 73%. Hardimon, who became principal during the transition, spearheaded the change in how educators engaged students, delivered instruction, and used data to inform decisions.

Her whole-team approach to instructional leadership resulted in students performing well above state



See Q&A with
Star Hardimon
on the next
page

averages in English language arts (56%) and math (65%), compared to the state average of 48% in both subjects, according to 2018-19 data (the most recent available data at the time of the Founder's Award). Similarly, the 2019-

20 WIDA 2.0 assessment shows that more than 55% of English Language Learners are exceeding targets to meet the state's long-term goals for language development, compared to the state average of over 30%.

Q&A with Star Hardimon

What is the biggest strength you saw from your educators at Douglas MacArthur?

Educators at Douglas MacArthur developed a keen focus on what students need for success. We no longer talked about what we “think;” it became about the evidence, the data, the reflection on what went well, and next steps. Teachers also recognized the benefit of creating an environment of risk-taking to support critical thinking.

What do you think is the biggest strategy that Douglas MacArthur adopted that helped to accelerate student achievement?

Along with our focus on critical-thinking strategies, Douglas MacArthur also strengthened our processes for student accountability and our work of intentionally focusing on students performing in the bottom 25%.

What did you learn from your teachers and students during the pandemic?

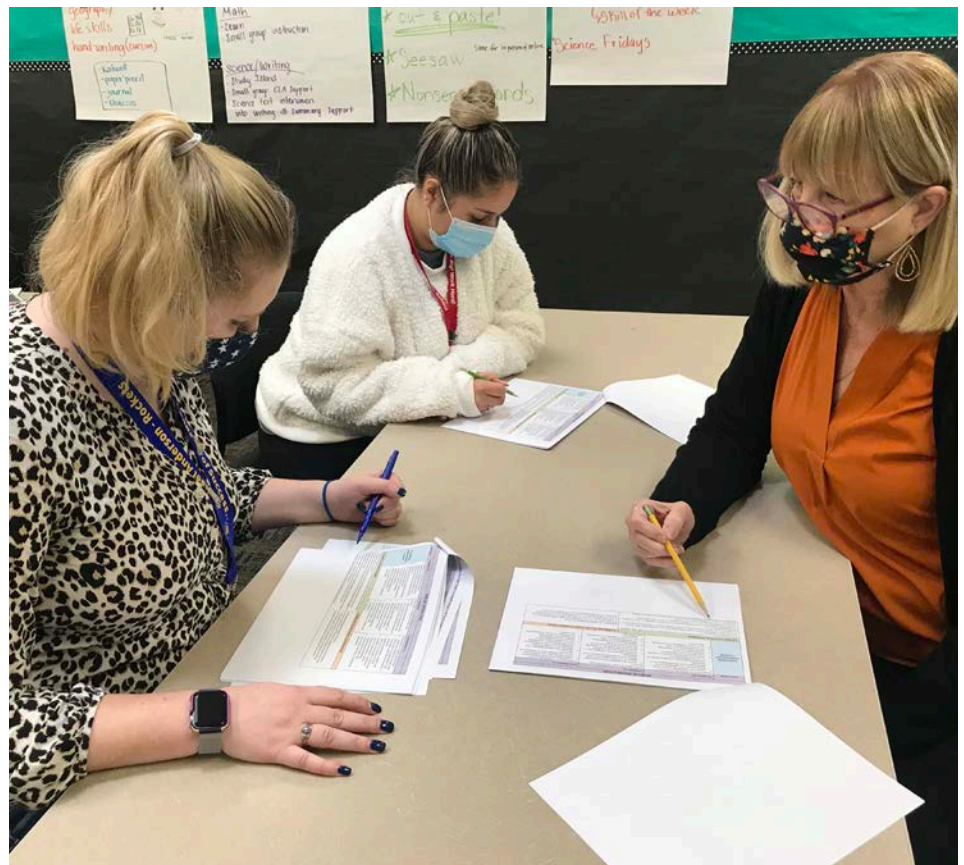
What I learned is that they are resilient but need transparency. Balance is critical. We must find the balance between relationships and academics, even if that balance looks different daily, weekly, monthly. Social-emotional wellness for both students and staff are critical to a healthy school environment.

2021 Founder’s Award \$10,000 Finalist

**Michael Anderson School, Avondale
Elementary School District, Arizona**

Michael Anderson School serves a dynamic group of 840 students, of whom 89% are Hispanic, a quarter are English Language Learners, and all are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Having led the school since the beginning of the NIET partnership, Principal Lori Goslar has seen the growth of teachers and students firsthand as they have made the NIET rubric — a comprehensive, research-based set of exemplary instructional practices — their own. Since that time, the growth in teachers’ skills each year has led to gains in student achievement: The percentages of students testing proficient in English language arts and math have more than doubled, and the school’s state rating has jumped from a C to a high B.

“The structures of NIET and its rubrics serve as a timeless avenue that has built teaching, learning, and results,” Goslar said. “We have continued to grow, anchored to the rubric in every way. It creates a



pathway for teachers, students, and families. NIET has taken me from a procedural leader to a conceptual leader aware of continuing possibilities

that have resulted in positive outcomes and celebrations for me and my team of career teachers, leadership team members, and students.”

2021 Founder's Award \$10,000 Finalist

North DeSoto High School,
DeSoto Parish Schools, Louisiana

Through building a strong culture of support and high expectations at the school and district levels, DeSoto Parish has developed and retained effective teachers and has drawn talent to the district. North DeSoto High School Principal Tammie Phillips, a 25-year educator, is one such leader. She and her leadership team are working to maintain the school's A state rating while encouraging teachers to take their practice to the next level. Phillips finds it highly beneficial to perform "learning walks" with colleagues to observe how students are engaging with teachers and the content in real time and identify strengths and strategies to reinforce. Students are also being well-prepared for college and career, earning A state ratings in



ACT mastery, graduation, and strength of diploma.

"NIET's processes have fostered so much reflection in me," said Phillips.

"They've allowed me to think about what I've done, how I've grown, and most importantly, how I can foster growth in teachers."

2021 Founder's Award \$10,000 Finalist

Prairie View Elementary School,
Goshen Community Schools, Indiana

Serving all students is at the cornerstone of Prairie View's work, and Principal Donna Wiktorowski has delved deeply into NIET structures to develop a coaching model that builds teachers' skill sets and addresses educational inequities and challenges. The school serves a majority-minority population, with more than 25% of students classified as English Language Learners. As a result of educators' commitment, students are meeting and exceeding proficiency targets at higher percentages than state averages because all teachers are consistently supported, valued, and committed to excellent instruction.

"TAP makes it possible to include practicing teachers in setting goals, managing data, and taking the lead to implement the best practices we want to see in every classroom," said



Wiktorowski. Having the structure and time for an instructional leadership team to support and build trust with

teachers has had a "significant impact" on her effectiveness as a leader and the achievement of the school as a whole.

LEAD LEARNERS



Leader to Learn From: Quincy Natay



EdWeek[®] Leaders To Learn From

Excerpt from EdWeek Leaders to Learn From, February 2021. Chinle USD is a partner with NIET, and Chinle Elementary School was named a 2020 Founder's Award finalist because of its focus on student achievement and growth.

We went from being the worst-performing Navajo district to best-performing. I had two schools on the verge of becoming A campuses on the state report cards.

Superintendent Quincy Natay, Chinle Unified School District

Chinle Unified School District in Chinle, Arizona, serves a sprawling, 4,200 square mile area of the Navajo Nation. It encompasses the stunning cliff walls of the Canyon de Chelly National Monument as well as arid stretches of dusty, unpaved roads where some Native American families live without running water or electricity.

The far-flung nature of the district meant that when the COVID-19 pandemic hit last year, Superintendent Quincy Natay already had a challenging job leading a 3,600-student district where many students lack internet connections and live in poverty. Natay knew that job was about to get even more difficult.

"Leading into this school year [2020-21], we knew the pandemic was not going away," said Natay. "I was concerned about learning loss and knew we had to come up with a reopening plan."

The plan that Natay and the district crafted included acquiring enough

laptops so every student could have one at home, purchasing 1,000 Wi-Fi hotspots from internet providers, and deploying buses throughout the district each day so each could be a distribution point for packets, Wi-Fi connections, and school lunches. While many districts across the nation have implemented similar strategies, the need for stronger connectivity was especially critical for Chinle's students.

Natay has been the superintendent since 2013. He is Navajo and grew up in Chinle, attending the district's schools before embarking on a career with Chinle Unified. The superintendent's own staff members as well as outside observers laud Natay as a soft-spoken but steady leader who has built on his roots in the community to promote high expectations for educators and students in the Chinle district.

Chinle Unified and its seven schools

have shown significant gains on state tests in recent years, though there is still plenty of room for improvement. The passing rate for English/language arts went from 9 percent in 2015 to 21 percent in 2018. In mathematics, it grew from 15 percent in 2015 to 29 percent in 2018.

"We went from being the worst-performing Navajo district to best-performing," said Natay. "I had two schools on the verge of becoming A campuses on the state report cards."

The NIET partnership has helped foster a professional learning community in which the stakeholders are constantly analyzing data and figuring out what is working and what isn't, Natay said. The superintendent attributes the academic gains to strategic planning that includes all stakeholders in the district, a preschool program that began five years ago, and a detailed curriculum that is consistent across all schools.

EdWeek Leaders to Learn From | Author: Matt Walsh | Photographer: Steven St. John

Grant support: Coverage of leadership, summer learning, social and emotional learning, arts learning, and afterschool is supported in part by a grant from The Wallace Foundation, at www.wallacefoundation.org. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.

Somerset ISD Students Outperform Their Peers

Long before the pandemic, Somerset ISD in Texas made a commitment to district-wide innovation and improvement that focused on the development of teacher leaders. Somerset serves about 4,100 students, 90% of whom are Hispanic and 82% of whom are economically disadvantaged. At one point, the district was labeled in need of improvement by the state. Somerset initiated a partnership with NIET in 2010 to improve the district's support for teachers and high-quality instruction as its key lever to improve student outcomes.

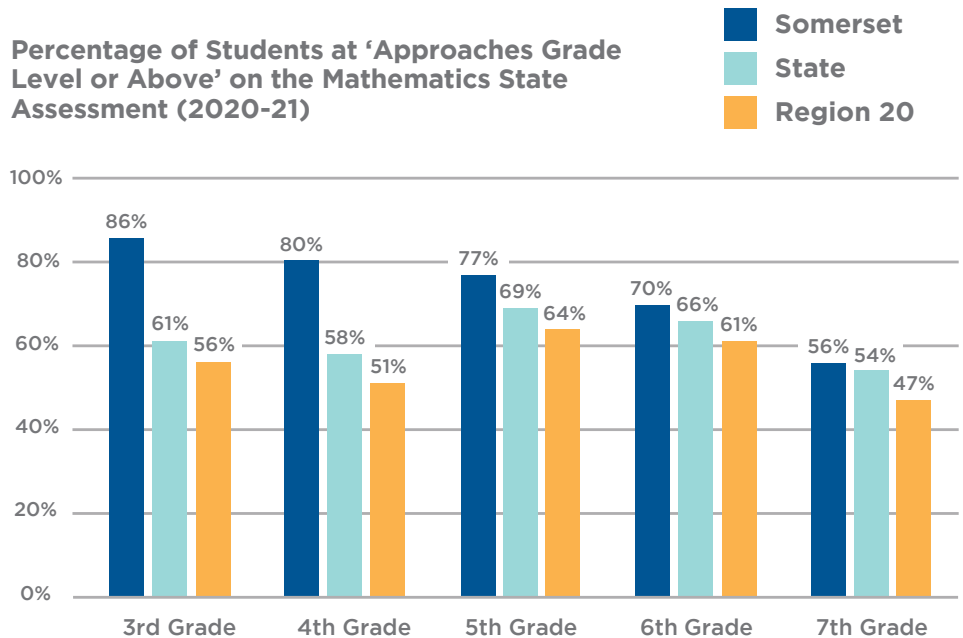
What worked for Somerset was a system focused on support for effective classroom teaching and increased student academic achievement growth for the highest-need students. The approach included new teacher leadership roles, as part of the school leadership team; school-based professional learning delivered by teacher leaders; support for principals to create distributed leadership teams; and strengthening the teacher pipeline to ensure that new teachers have the knowledge and skills to be effective on day one.

Somerset's focus on educator excellence and student progress was celebrated in November 2020 when the district was awarded the NIET Award of Excellence for Educator Effectiveness and \$50,000. The award acknowledges Somerset's broader, long-standing commitment to innovation, and it specifically highlights the district's efforts to help teachers stay and thrive in the classroom, effectively prepare new teachers, and make steady increases in student proficiency. By building a system that supports every teacher and school leader to continue to

Somerset Independent School District (TX)

outperformed the state and their region on the mathematics state assessment (2020-21)

Percentage of Students at 'Approaches Grade Level or Above' on the Mathematics State Assessment (2020-21)



Source: Somerset ISD, 2021



learn and improve, Somerset is better supporting students to excel.

This spring, they put an exclamation point on their efforts. On the 2021 state exams, Somerset outperformed the state and their region on the math state assessment across grade levels,

becoming one of the few districts in the state to show growth this spring. For example, 86% of third grade students in Somerset were performing at "Approaches Grade Level or Above" in math, compared to 61% statewide. Somerset also outperformed the state and their region in several other subjects and grade levels.

As districts deepen their focus on pandemic learning recovery, those that continue to keep high-quality instruction at the forefront — like Somerset — are positioned to accelerate student learning growth. Somerset's students and teachers have shown that creating systems that allow for teacher leadership and collaborative instructional leadership is a pathway to achieving success, no matter the challenges.

Strengthening Our Standards

NIET engages in ongoing efforts to increase student ownership and take learning to the next level. In 2021, following a comprehensive review of current research and best practices, we made updates to the K-12 NIET rubric.

Specifically, the rubric descriptors were refined to ensure an increased focus on equity, student ownership, and student work across all domains. To underscore the emphasis on students, we renamed the rubric to the *NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric*.

Some of the changes to the descriptor language include:

- A greater focus on what students are doing and learning
- More emphasis on student work analysis
- Significant shifts in level 5 to show students taking ownership of their learning

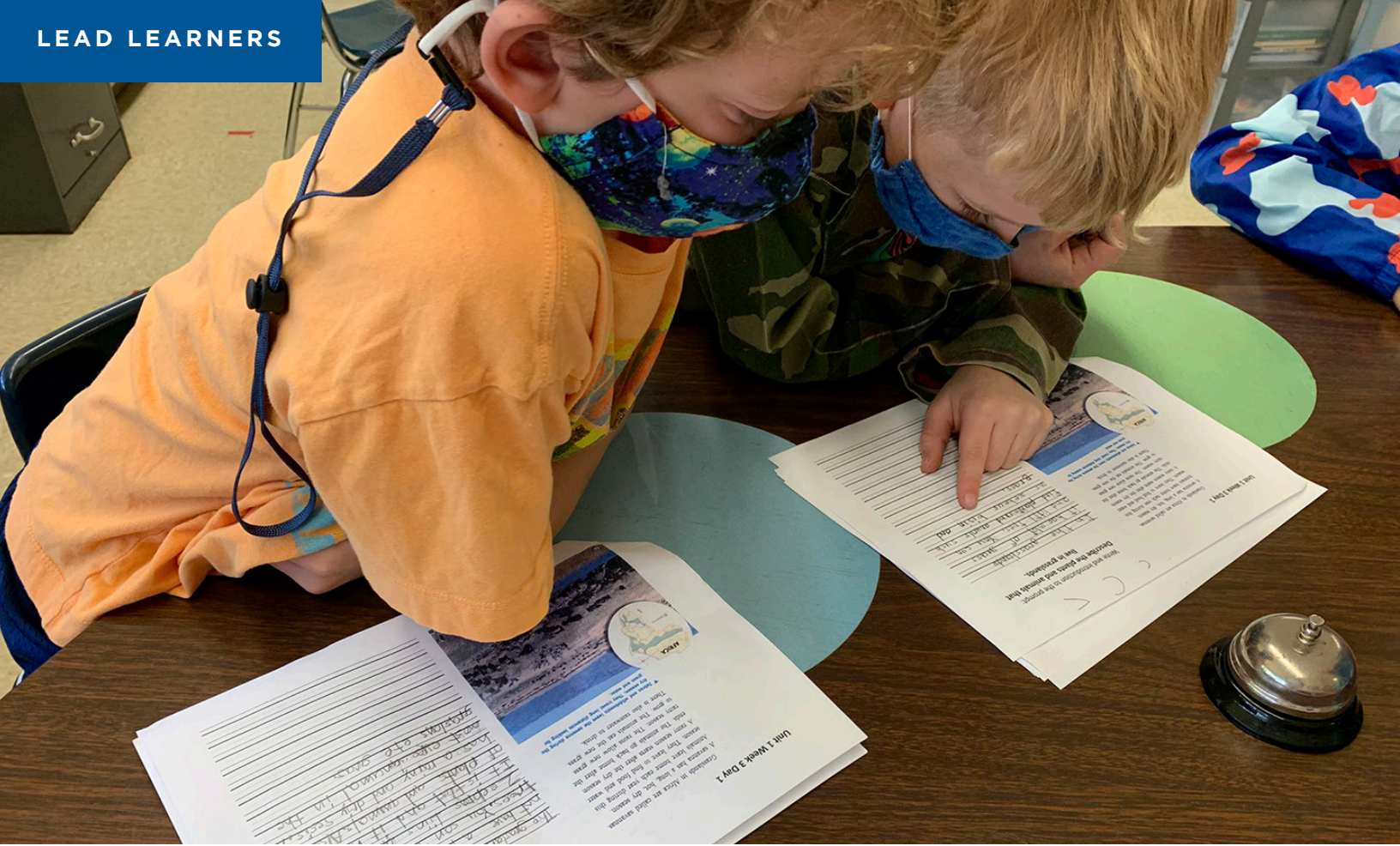
In addition, we created more guidance for the *Teacher Content Knowledge* indicator by designing subject-specific look-for tools to help coaches provide rich feedback, including for English language arts,

math, science, and K-2 foundational reading. [Example below.] These resources offer guidance for leaders to help them strengthen instructional practice tied to a teacher's content knowledge as they align with more rigorous standards and curriculum. The look-for tools can be particularly beneficial for leaders who may not have extensive experience with that content area themselves.

We have shared the updated resources in EE PASS. The *Teacher Content Knowledge* look-for tools are also available at NIET.org/resources.

Below is a snapshot of the look-for tool for K-2 foundational reading, highlighting one descriptor within the *Teacher Content Knowledge* indicator

| KEY CONTENT FROM DESCRIPTOR | LOOK-FORS: EXAMPLES OF TEACHER AND STUDENT EVIDENCE | OBSERVATION |
|--|--|------------------------|
| Implements a variety of subject-specific instructional strategies | FOCUS (OVERARCHING PRACTICES) | |
| | Teacher uses gradual release model targeting grade-appropriate foundational reading skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print concepts, including letter recognition (K-1) • Phonological, including phonemic awareness (K-2) • Phonics and word recognition (K-2) • Fluency (From late K) <i>Students might: learn using written text or with entirely oral/aural activities, depending on the target skill(s)</i> | Yes Some Not Yet |
| | Teacher uses formal and informal assessment data to plan and adjust instruction so that all students have enough, but not too much, time and support to master target skills. <i>Students might: take turns responding to teacher prompts or reading aloud while the teacher takes notes</i> | Yes Some Not Yet |
| | QUESTIONING (WHAT IS HEARD) | |
| | Teacher prompts students to focus on sounds and to decode systematically ("sound it out") when possible instead of guessing at words using pictures or memorizing them as wholes. <i>Students might: persist through difficulty by isolating, segmenting, and blending sounds when stuck on a word</i> | Yes Some Not Yet |
| | Teacher focuses feedback on target and previously learned skills: for example, prompting students to correct invented spelling patterns only for words they have already learned how to spell. <i>Students might: spell words incorrectly but in ways that "make sense" given their emerging phonics knowledge</i> | Yes Some Not Yet |
| | STUDENT WORK (RIGOROUS TASKS) | |
| | All students practice target skills out of context in varied and multisensory ways: for example, with chants, manipulatives, movement, games, and puzzles. <i>Students might: engage in whole-class, teacher-led games and chants before moving into group or individual work</i> | Yes Some Not Yet |
| All students practice target and previously learned skills in context through repeated and increasingly fluent readings of decodable text (from late K). <i>Students might: read aloud individually or chorally in small groups determined by recent assessment results</i> | Yes Some Not Yet | |



Designing and Sharing Resources to Support More Educators

With the start of the pandemic, NIET began developing resources to support educators with high-quality instruction in virtual and hybrid learning environments. These resources, which have been viewed tens of thousands of times, both supported current partners and helped new educators to learn about us. NIET specialists and professional learning team members drew from their experiences coaching and supporting educators to design the tools and templates. We saw principals share resources with their teams, and teacher leaders accessed new tools to support their coaching.

This summer, NIET designed a new web page, [NIET.org/resources](https://niet.org/resources),

which is now the most viewed page on the NIET website. It includes more than 100 publicly available resources, including planning and guidance documents, instructional and coaching tools, advice for remote and hybrid learning, templates, and webinars. Resources cover everything from curriculum implementation and content knowledge to learning acceleration and student ownership.

This fall, NIET released new resources to help educators foster a positive school environment and support character development. The end of the semester is a key moment for leaders to step back and celebrate the strengths they have seen educators exhibit so far in the school year. For the

past 18 months, teachers have shown incredible resilience, and as they have continued to adapt and learn new strategies, they are discovering skills and strengths that could be shared across the campus.

On the opposite page, we have an example of a resource that can facilitate that sharing through a mid-year reflection. Leaders and coaches can use this guide to support teachers and drive student growth by pinpointing instructional strengths they have observed and making a plan to spread those practices across the building. For more tools to foster a positive environment and strengthen student ownership and learning acceleration, visit [NIET.org/resources](https://niet.org/resources).

Mid-year reflection guide to support school leaders and coaches in fostering a strengths-based environment

| STEPS FOR STRENGTHS-BASED REFLECTION | GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS AND COACHES |
|--|---|
| <p>Step 1: Gather evidence of teacher strengths from the past semester that led to student engagement, ownership, and a positive learning experience.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you see a teacher try new instructional strategies or practices these past few months? How did you respond and reward that action? • What strategies did a teacher try to increase student engagement? Were there “wins” you could share with the broader team? • What specific actions did a teacher take that positively impacted a student’s growth and learning? • How can you proactively provide positive feedback to the teacher about the observed strength(s) to encourage and build investment for a later conversation? Consider sending a quick note detailing the strength and how you observed students benefiting from this instructional move. |
| <p>Step 2: Decide which teacher strengths to highlight and leverage in other classrooms. Take a moment to bring attention to specific, individual teacher strengths in a public or celebratory way.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want your school environment to look and feel like in the spring? How did you see teachers building momentum toward that vision this fall? • Is there a specific teacher move you observed that addresses an identified need in the building? • Is there a specific teacher move that might be the easiest for another teacher to observe or effectively replicate? • How can you shout out the teacher’s strength in front of their peers? • How can you celebrate the teacher’s practice while acknowledging their resilience and specifically pointing out obstacles they had to overcome this year? |
| <p>Step 3: Identify the most effective place to leverage this strength.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who else could utilize or try out the strength(s) you observed? • Who already has a positive working relationship with the teacher with the identified strength(s)? Would that teacher be willing to work with his or her peers to share more? • Who has a classroom culture that is primed for the identified strategy? • How can you utilize this strengths-based process to bring your teachers closer together as a team? Consider guiding PLC/cluster conversations around an identified strength and allowing teachers to share additional feedback. |
| <p>Step 4: Develop a plan for transferring the strategy across classrooms.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What structures are already in place that allow teachers to collaborate? • Which leadership team member(s) is the best fit to guide this process? • Which process for transfer is most appropriate in this situation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-planning, observation, and debrief - Collaborative planning with grade level/department - Analysis of impact of the teacher strategy on student work - Recorded lesson segment shared as a model in PLCs/cluster |
| <p>Step 5: Determine areas of focus and a strategy to check-in on progress.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the identified strengths across the school, how will you select which areas to target and focus on in the upcoming semester? How will you communicate that with educators? • What supports will teachers need to scale the transfer of this learning into their classrooms? How will their progress be monitored? • How can you collaborate to implement the plan and make refinements? • How will you follow up to ensure teachers feel supported? • How will you define success? • How will you celebrate success, individually and publicly? |

The Untapped Potential of the Principal Supervisor:

How Support for School Leaders Should Change

One of the biggest challenges of 2020-21 was translating instruction to the virtual environment — and the role of the school leader was critical. In working with school leaders, we increasingly see that the support of district leadership can be a difference-maker. When district principal supervisors focus on coaching, their impact is magnified — but too often, that isn't the case. In April, we released a report to provide four strategies for how principal supervisors can shift their role into a coaching position. The first strategy is to be a visible partner and model being a lead learner. Dr. Roddy Melancon, principal of Gonzales Primary School, and his principal supervisor, Dr. Latatia Johnson, gave us an inside look into how they have shifted to be visible leaders **and** learners in Ascension Parish Schools, Louisiana (see below).

Drs. Melancon and Johnson show that when leaders spend time with principals and actively engage as learners, they contribute to the development of a culture of reflection and continuous improvement. To read more strategies for district leaders to strengthen their support for school leaders, visit [NIET.org](https://niet.org).

THE FOUR STRATEGIES

1. Be a visible partner and model being a lead learner.
2. Develop a common vision and consistently use a shared language that describes expectations for principals around the instructional leadership aspects of their role.
3. Establish a coaching, feedback, and support system that is aligned with expectations in evaluation.
4. Create opportunities for collaboration and capacity-building.



Read more at [NIET.org/research-and-policy](https://niet.org/research-and-policy).

RM: “Dr. Johnson challenged me to be visible as an instructional leader. She modeled with me, and she pushed me to become more involved in activities like PLCs and conversations around student work.”

RM: “I had to show that I prioritized instructional leadership, protect that time, and not always be the one to leave the room to handle every issue or crisis. Looking back, it was very easy to switch to an instructional leader mindset by being visible. It was being visible in PLCs and engaging in conversation, being visible when teachers were doing planning and getting involved in looking at student work, and being visible and engaged in the learning of every student in the class.”

LJ: “I attend every leadership team meeting on my campuses that I can. From there, we follow up, and I support principals during walk-throughs. I find that if we put it on our calendars and we commit to ‘This is what we’re doing, this is when we’re going in, these are the discussions that we’re having,’ that works for us.”

LJ: “Like anything that takes place in a school, it’s about establishing trust with the principal and getting them to recognize that it’s a partnership. I want results for their students and their teachers just like they want results for their students and their teachers.”

Why New Teacher Mentoring Falls Short, and How to Fix It

Being a “rookie” is tough in any job, but it is especially tough for new teachers who are often left to navigate their first year alone — and when we consider the challenges that new teachers are facing this fall, the first year is even more daunting. State leaders have responded with policies and funding to support mentorship programs in which experienced educators are paired with new educators to provide feedback and guidance. While this is a step in the right direction, too many of these programs operate as little more than a buddy system.

Louisiana and Texas are leading efforts to improve district-based

mentoring programs. These states have intentionally focused on equipping mentors to engage in instructionally focused coaching while aligning the work of mentors to school and district initiatives. Both Louisiana and Texas approve training providers at the state level to ensure quality, and NIET has been approved to work with districts in both states.

Districts that have strengthened their mentoring programs with our support have identified strategies that are supporting new teachers to be more effective earlier in their careers — and in September, we released a new report to share these ideas.

By shifting the purpose of

mentoring and adopting these strategies, districts can better support new teachers. States play a role in elevating the importance and effectiveness of new teacher mentoring, concentrating resources on schools serving higher numbers of disadvantaged students and targeting mentoring on instructional improvement. If these strategies are embraced at the district and state levels, not only will more students have access to great teaching, but more new teachers will likely want to stay in the classroom — tackling a key issue we know is pressing right now. To read more, visit niet.org/research-and-policy.

Strategy 1

Focus mentoring on instructional improvement.

- Establish a clear purpose for mentoring: improving teaching and learning.
- Invest in mentoring through funding time, training, and the use of an evidence-based instructional rubric.
- Create a clear job description, define compensation for mentors, and select the right people for the job.

Strategy 2

Support mentors to be more effective by providing training, tools, and protocols for the role.

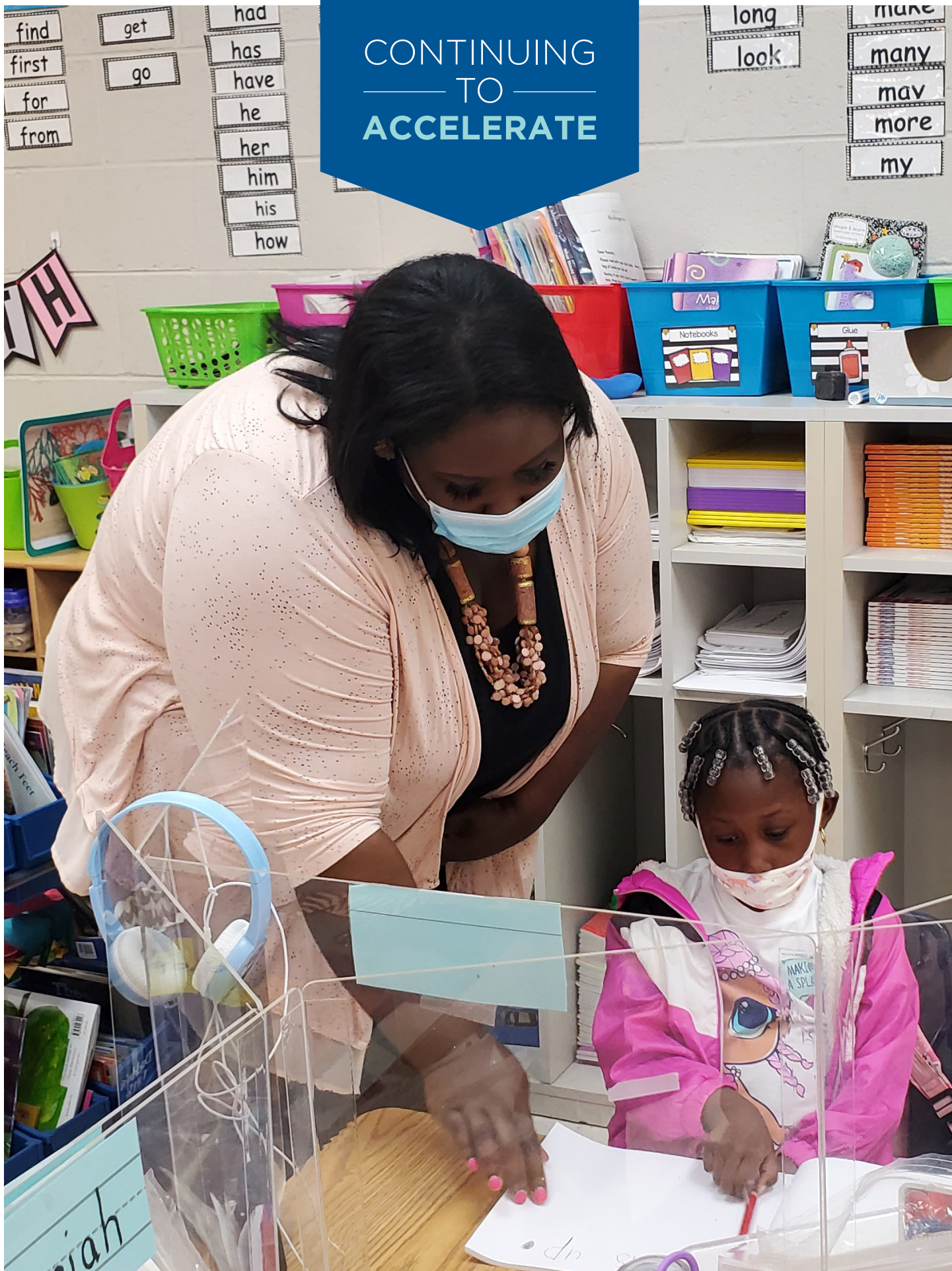
- Start by establishing trust and a growth mindset.
- Ground mentoring in student outcomes and the needs of the mentee.
- Use a cycle of coaching for continuous improvement.
- Create opportunities for mentors to collaborate.

Strategy 3

Align the mentoring program with district and school systems and goals.

- Support principals to integrate mentors in the school leadership structure.
- Connect mentoring to district and school priorities or initiatives.

CONTINUING
— TO —
ACCELERATE



The Power of Teacher Leadership

Over the past 20 years, NIET has proven that when teachers are empowered and elevated as leaders, students succeed, educators stay, and schools improve. NIET's foundational tools and structures, like the *Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric* and TAP System, are research-based approaches that continue to show success. All of NIET's services are built from these core strategies.

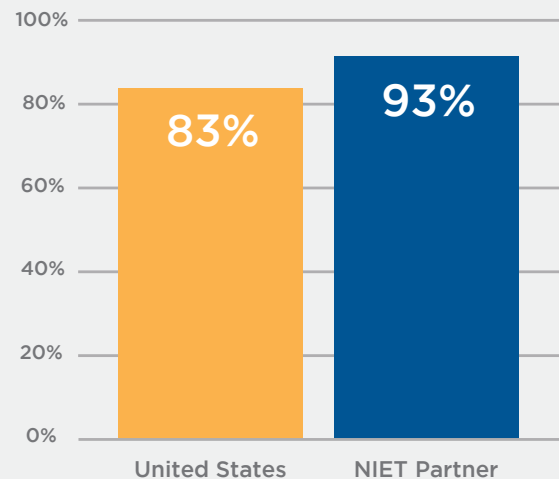
When NIET asked educators in partner schools — where teacher leaders are provided opportunities, time, and compensation to take on additional roles and responsibilities — whether they intend to stay in the profession for the next five years, they showed more positive responses than peers, with most teachers indicating they want to stay. This is a common response among NIET's partners, and we often see that show up in higher retention rates over time (see top right).

Additionally, NIET partner schools overwhelmingly find that professional learning is an effective tool for improving educators' instruction — which is not the response to professional learning in many districts. NIET partners engage teacher leaders in planning, designing, and delivering professional learning and coaching for teachers in their school, building on their expertise and relationships to create a culture where everyone is a learner and teachers thrive (see bottom right).

Our partners include a diverse range of locations, but across the board, they show the power of teacher leadership. This section highlights more of those stories.

Nationally, Middle School Teachers in NIET Partner Schools Intend to Stay Longer in the Profession

Percentage of Middle School Teachers Intending to Remain in the Profession for At Least the Next Five Years

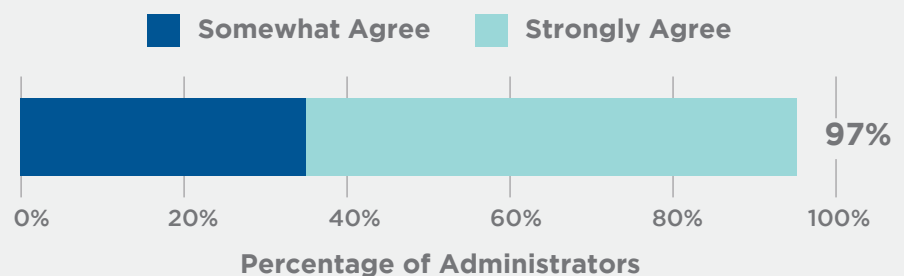


Source: NIET Department of Research and Evaluation, 2020

Professional Development

Administrators in NIET partner schools report that professional development has improved instruction

Professional development activities have improved overall teaching performance.



Source: NIET Department of Research and Evaluation, 2020

Expanding Our Partnerships

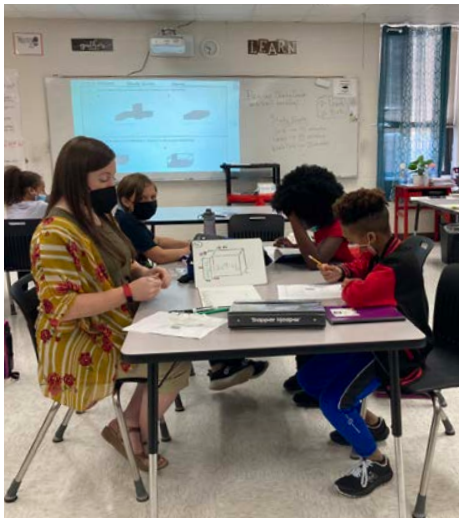
UPDATES ON KEY INNOVATIONS

NIET has created and supported networks across the country to better equip educators and empower teacher leaders. These efforts are creating schools and classrooms where students and teachers are able to be successful.

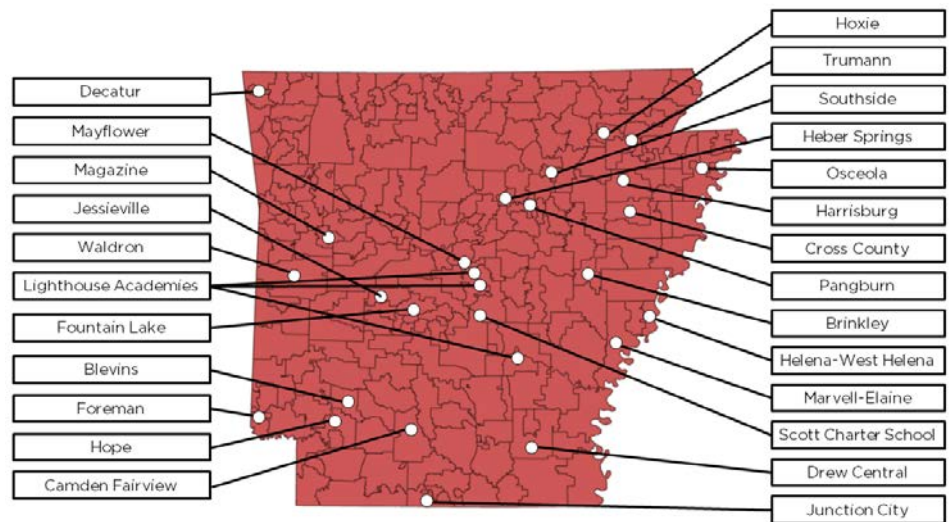
Arkansas Rural Educator Network (AREN)

NIET and the Walton Family Foundation partnered in 2020 to form the Arkansas Rural Educator Network (AREN) in order to help rural districts increase educator capacity. After a successful first year, additional leaders joined the network, and AREN now serves 23 school districts across the state.

AREN districts receive support from NIET specialists to develop a customized, district-specific plan of support, which is designed based on a strengths-based needs assessment to target support to learning recovery and acceleration, teacher leadership, principal leadership, high-quality instructional materials, and/or virtual instruction. Districts also receive on-site coaching and support, along with opportunities to collaborate with leaders across the state.



Districts in 2021-22 AREN Network



Texas Resilient Schools Support Program (RSSP)

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) launched the Resilient Schools Support Program (RSSP) in 2020 as an effort to support Texas school districts with remote instruction, ensuring leadership support that was focused on providing high-quality instruction and coaching to students and teachers. TEA approved NIET as an official technical assistance provider for the program, and in 2020-21, NIET senior specialists supported and coached leaders across four districts through self-assessments, goal setting, support cycles with targeted improvement strategies, and review meetings.

Year two of the program began in April 2021, with NIET supporting Alice

ISD, Dickinson ISD, Lake Worth ISD, Pflugerville ISD, and San Felipe Del Rio CISD. The focus now is learning acceleration, and in addition to regular check-ins, NIET provides ongoing support. Both virtual and in-person support includes strategic planning, training, coaching, and data analysis in partnership with educators. Districts have shared that the partnership has helped them increase their focus on systems and structures that build teachers' capacity to grow students academically.

Texas Mentor Program Allotment (MPA)

Recognizing the need to intentionally support new teachers, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3 in June 2019, creating the Mentor Program

Allotment (MPA). MPA provides Texas districts with funds to build or sustain beginning teacher mentor programs in which experienced educators are paired with teachers who are new to their school or subject area. Funds may be used on mentor stipends, scheduled release time for mentoring activities, and mentor training.

During cycle one in 2020-21, NIET supported 17 districts and 335 mentor teachers by providing training and support to help mentor teachers provide feedback focused on ultimately improving instruction. After the training, 94 percent of mentor teachers expressed that they felt sufficiently or well prepared in understanding their roles and responsibilities as a mentor teacher. Cycle two of the MPA began in July, and NIET is supporting 12 districts and their mentor teachers through a combination of training and support, with the continued goal of ensuring that mentor teachers are equipped to coach and guide new teachers in delivering high-quality instruction to students.

Accelerating Character Education Development (ACED)

The Kern Family Foundation and NIET partnered in 2020 to support school leaders in the development of quality character education through the Accelerating Character Education Development (ACED) for School Leaders initiative. Earlier this year, we conducted a pilot with nine schools and developed a character-focused tool that accompanies the *NIET Principal Standards Rubric*. This tool, in addition to NIET training and support opportunities, is designed to

support school leaders in integrating character education and related social and emotional learning skills into instruction, school environment, and school culture. Through initial training, online resources, on-site support, and the tool itself, ACED helps school and district leaders to plan and develop sustainable character education development practices.

Initial pilot districts Algiers Charter and Tangipahoa Parish School System provided strong feedback, with 100 percent of participants saying the training was very helpful for planning the integration of character education. For the second year of the pilot, leaders in nearly 50 schools are attending training and implementing the character-focused tool. Participating schools receive a stipend and will provide feedback to NIET on the companion tool and this growing initiative.

Tennessee Rural Acceleration and Innovation Network (TRAIN)

In 2020, the Ayers Foundation, NIET, the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning and Innovation, and the Statewide Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) created a partnership — the Tennessee Rural Acceleration and Innovation Network (TRAIN) — to support Tennessee rural school districts in addressing the challenges of teaching and learning during COVID-19. This school year, TRAIN has expanded and is serving 33 school districts to increase support for students and teachers in rural and remote parts of the state, with a

targeted focus on serving the districts with the most need.

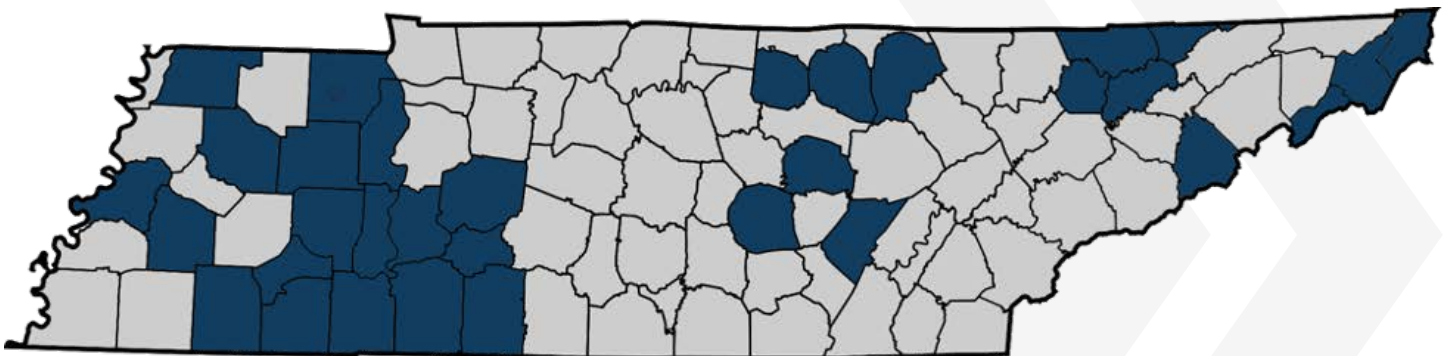
Support for each district in 2021-22 is based on a strengths-based needs assessment conducted by NIET specialists, and all professional learning aims to increase school leaders' and teachers' abilities to tailor school-wide support and instruction to meet the unique needs of their students. District leaders will continue to meet monthly in network sessions to collaborate and problem-solve throughout the school year.

Tennessee Literacy Implementation Networks (TLIN)

In March, the Tennessee Department of Education launched the Pre-K-12 Literacy Implementation Networks, part of the state's Reading 360 initiative to help boost strong reading skills for Tennessee students. Across eight regional implementation networks, 48 districts were selected to participate, with the goal of supporting the implementation of high-quality English language arts instructional materials for students over the next five years. Each region's network includes one mentor district, four to six participating districts, and a regionally selected vendor partner.

NIET was selected as the partner for the Mid-Cumberland and South Central networks and is supporting 12 Tennessee districts as they implement high-quality ELA materials. Each network taps into collaborative learning opportunities as well as virtual and on-site meetings and learning walks to workshop common problems of practice.

Districts in 2021-22 TRAIN Network





Supporting State Leaders to Train Teachers

Most teachers had never faced a greater learning curve than when the COVID-19 pandemic forced them to confront the reality of virtual teaching — and it happened essentially overnight. At a national level, given the immediacy of the need, we saw different approaches to supporting educators in the shift to virtual and hybrid learning. While some states continued the traditional model of working through districts to provide support, others went directly to teachers and school leaders themselves and offered training to equip them with virtual instruction.

Both Louisiana and South Carolina quickly moved to make free, high-quality virtual instruction training available to thousands of teachers and principals statewide. About 3,000 educators in these states registered for sessions in the first week they were announced, and they provided applicable strategies. “This session taught the ability to take what we already know and do in the classroom and apply it to the same level of excellence in a virtual setting,” said one South Carolina educator.

In partnership with NIET, these

trainings have continued into 2021 and evolved to fit the new needs educators have while still allowing states to directly support teachers and leaders. In the spring, NIET’s partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education transitioned to offer a new training focused on blended and hybrid learning. The Louisiana Department of Education also partnered with us to offer educators training on best instructional practices and learning acceleration, particularly targeting those schools that have been identified as in need of improvement.

South Carolina Prepares for Blended Learning

The South Carolina Department of Education recognized that virtual learning was not just a one-time endeavor, and aspects of virtual and hybrid learning will continue into the future. To this end, the department partnered with NIET to offer a free training series, *Blended and Hybrid Learning: Student Engagement, Thinking, and Choice*, to all South Carolina educators. The trainings focused on how to teach in environments that involve both virtual and in-person components, and they were designed to support educators in all roles, including teachers, teacher leaders, school leaders, and district administrators. Higher education faculty and student teachers also participated.

In this two-module training, participants examined hybrid and blended instructional structures and strategies that support individual student needs and individualized learning. They analyzed planning, delivery, and assessment components of a lesson and identified steps to strengthen current instructional practices by offering students critical thinking opportunities and choice.

Louisiana Focuses on Learning Acceleration and Strong Instruction

In preparation for the 2021-22 school year, knowing that learning acceleration was the top priority after two challenging school years, the Louisiana Department of Education partnered with NIET to offer 2021-22 Best Practices for Louisiana Schools training. The opportunity supported schools in leveraging five essential components that drive professional and student growth:

- Instructional Leadership Teams
- Teacher Collaboration
- Teacher and Learning Standards
- Principal Standards
- Career Pipelines

Each of these components were covered in an individual training, often



delivered virtually, and districts were able to use Louisiana Super App funds or federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to participate.

In addition to the Best Practices training, this fall Louisiana doubled down on efforts to accelerate learning by offering free access to the Louisiana Acceleration Series for the state's educators. The series, which will be offered both in-person and virtually through March 2022, includes six trainings that are designed to help educators target their instruction and coaching on the most effective strategies for accelerating student learning.

While these sessions build on one another, educators can take them individually. The trainings focus on the following areas:

1. Analyzing and Using Data to Meet the Needs of Students

2. Maximizing Collaborative Structures to Support Learning Recovery
3. Planning for Accelerated Learning Options and Individualized Learning
4. Strengthening Content-Specific Strategies for Learning Recovery in Math
5. Strengthening Content-Specific Strategies for Learning Recovery in ELA
6. Setting Up Effective Summer Learning Opportunities

The innovative and responsive tone that both South Carolina and Louisiana took to provide high-quality professional learning to educators, especially during unknown and shifting circumstances, is an example of how states can proactively create meaningful educator support that results in student success.

Leveraging Teacher Leadership to Accelerate Learning in Indiana

High rates of teacher turnover and persistent student achievement gaps are ongoing challenges for many schools in Indiana, similar to much of the country. Leaders have responded with a range of initiatives to strengthen teaching and to increase student access to effective teachers. One of the most promising is the development of teacher career pathways and distributed leadership models focused on strengthening classroom instruction. This approach was endorsed by the Governor's Next Level Teacher Compensation Commission in 2020. NIET's Indiana partners have used a variety of funding streams to invest in building capacity, including federal funds from a Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program grant and state funds from Indiana's Career Ladder Grant.

Teacher Leader Expertise Is Reaching More Students

Since being awarded a federal TSL grant with NIET in 2019, Brown County Schools, Goshen Community Schools, and Perry Township Schools have strengthened their efforts to make teacher leadership a core strategy for improvement. The districts are ensuring teacher leadership roles are filled by highly effective teachers, allowing their expertise to benefit a greater number of students.

When hiring, district and school leaders communicate the support that all teachers receive, enhancing recruitment efforts. In a time of teacher shortages, teachers are choosing to join these districts, drawn by high levels of support and opportunities to advance in their



careers. The teacher leadership structure is not only helping to recruit talent to the districts, but it is also helping to increase the retention of effective teachers and increase equitable access as more students are taught by an effective teacher.

Teacher Leaders Have Supported Student Success Through the Pandemic

In early 2020, the Indiana Department of Education awarded Career Ladder Grants to five NIET partner districts: Whitko Community Schools, Muncie Community Schools, MSD of Martinsville, Michigan City Area Schools, and Nettle Creek Schools. Over the past year, these districts have been proof that creating teacher leaders and investing in their skills creates a powerful driver for improvement.

Teacher leaders have stepped in to help plan virtual, hybrid, and in-person lessons; identify learning gaps; bolster student engagement; and provide individual coaching

and support. In the process, they demonstrated the power of tapping into the expertise of teachers to help principals lead improvements in teaching and learning. They are a key part of each district's plan for academic recovery. During a time when there were a lot of unknowns, teacher leaders eased the burden for classroom teachers and enabled them to better support students.

Sustaining Progress in the Coming School Year

Teacher leaders in NIET's Indiana partner districts are leading the way: analyzing data, highlighting where individual teachers and students need support, and customizing strategies to address needs. These educators will strengthen schools for years to come. The structures and strategies put in place with the support of federal and state funds have enabled these districts to create more effective teaching and learning in every classroom while building cultures of growth and equity.

Investing in Innovation

As a partner in multiple federal grants, NIET is working across the country with educators who are on the cutting edge of educational improvement. The solutions being developed through these multiyear projects are shared at the regional, state, and national levels, and bring direct practitioner experience to policymakers and thought leaders in education. This provides an important way to elevate solutions designed and field-tested by practitioners in policy conversations.

In South Carolina, NIET is supporting the development of a network of principals serving high-need schools. The partnership includes school districts across the state, the University of South Carolina, and BranchED, a nonprofit focused on recruiting and retaining educators of color. The South Carolina Principal Leadership Network (SCPLN) project, funded through a three-year federal Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant, is changing the ways that principals are supported by creating a

network of principals who take part in collaborative learning with peers and are supported by expert coaches to apply the learning in their own school. To date, more than 100 school leaders from 51 schools across five districts have participated in this work to build collaborative networks and grow the instructional leadership skills of principals.

In Louisiana, NIET is completing work through the LA BOLD (Building on Leadership Development) project — funded through a five-year federal



Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSL) grant — to create professional learning systems at the school level that are also supported at the district level. Over 300 teacher leaders, along with school leaders at each campus, have been trained as coaches and facilitators of collaborative learning teams of teachers. When Louisiana rolled out new Tier I curriculum to strengthen the use of high-quality instructional materials, this network of experts in each school played a critical role in the successful use of these new, more rigorous materials by teachers. In addition, LA BOLD partners have developed more effective ways to support principals as instructional leaders, in part by elevating the role of principal supervisors as coaches

for principals.

In 2020, NIET kicked off another federal TSL project through a partnership of public school districts and charter schools in Indiana. The grant funds are enabling schools across the state to develop career pathways as part of systems for professional learning and growth. The work in these districts is providing a powerful model for other districts that are working to develop career pathways under a new state grant program.

Also in Indiana, a five-year Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant called “The Marian Promise” is bringing together NIET, Marian University, and three south Indianapolis area districts to recruit and prepare aspiring teachers to work in schools serving large numbers of low-income students.

This project is strengthening the bridge from teacher preparation into the classroom experience, ensuring both teacher candidates and teachers in their first two years receive more extensive preparation and ongoing mentorship as they begin their career.

By investing in people, and creating structures and systems that support collaborative work and coaching in-person and online, NIET and our grant partners are improving teaching and learning and increasing the percentage of high-need students with effective educators. Working together, we are strengthening relationships and networks across districts and states to better understand and use evidence-based practices that promote student success.

NIET Awarded New Federal Grants in 2021

In October, NIET learned we have been awarded or are part of three federal Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program awards that kick off this school year.

Texas: NIET has been awarded a three-year, \$12 million TSL grant to partner again with BranchED and four Texas school districts (Crockett, Gladewater, Slaton, and Somerset ISDs) to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness and improve teaching and learning in 19 high-need schools. This grant was designed to combat the learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and help accelerate student achievement in some of Texas’ highest-need communities.

Through this grant partnership,

called Texas IMPACT (Improving Management Systems for Principals and Classroom Teachers), educators will receive support from NIET and BranchED, a Texas-based nonprofit dedicated to diversifying the teaching profession and intentionally addressing critical issues of educational equity. The IMPACT districts represent diverse geographic regions across the state and will serve as models to other small districts within their regions, statewide, and nationally on how to strengthen support for educators.

Indiana: NIET will partner with Beech Grove City Schools on a three-year, \$4.8 million TSL grant to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, attract a more diverse group of educators, and improve teaching and learning in all five schools. Beech Grove will implement the TAP System

across the district as part of the grant, which was designed to address significant learning gaps, particularly those between different student populations, by improving classroom instruction and building school cultures that support equity, inclusion, and student engagement.

Arizona: NIET is partnering with Arizona State University and Mesa Public Schools for their grant to expand ASU’s Next Education Workforce (NEW), which aims to transform the traditional model of education staffing in schools by ensuring every child is taught by a collective group of highly effective educators. For this grant, NIET will lead two key components: refining the current NEW observation tool and MPS Portrait of a Graduate Look-Fors, and support the creation of the NEW compensation model.

Advancing Innovations to Support Aspiring Teachers

Over the past 18 months, NIET has been designing new resources to support higher education leaders during the pandemic and beyond. Even as we transition back to “normal,” there are lessons and strategies that NIET is continuing to utilize, such as the importance of widening aspiring teachers’ access to high-quality digital resources and expanding their ability to observe more lessons than they may otherwise be able to watch.

This spring, NIET expanded on its online platform to launch a new portal specifically for higher education, NIET PREP (Portal for Raising Educator Preparation), which is home to a wide array of resources for aspiring teachers and the educators who support them. These resources can

help fill in the pandemic-caused gaps in a new teacher’s preparation and strengthen support for future candidates. NIET PREP also includes NIET’s *Aspiring Teacher Rubric*, which is a foundational tool for aspiring teachers and their faculty and is rooted in NIET’s research-based *Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric*. The *Aspiring Teacher Rubric* includes a streamlined set of indicators to target the strategies that aspiring teachers most need to utilize, and it is complemented by NIET PREP resources, which bring those strategies to life.

Here are some key features and resources in NIET PREP and how we are seeing higher education institutions utilize them.

Videos of High-Quality Lessons

Aspiring teachers can learn a lot by observing teachers and seeing various instructional strategies in practice. NIET PREP’s video library houses hours of professionally filmed classroom lessons, along with pre- and post-conferences between the teacher and their coach. These videos illustrate instructional and classroom management practices across a range of skill levels, grades, and content areas. For some lessons, NIET has provided ideas for related activities and discussion questions for faculty members and site coordinators to utilize.

Training Modules on Instructional Skills

Making strong connections between theory and how it transforms to authentic practice has been challenging due to school closures and limits on visits, but this is often an area where aspiring teachers can be limited due to geography or the makeup of the school to which they are assigned.

The modules on NIET PREP not only support aspiring teachers, but NIET’s partners also use the training modules as a learning tool for the faculty and mentors responsible for observing and providing feedback. By using the modules, observers refine and calibrate their understanding of rubric language and what evidence looks like. This stronger understanding leads to more meaningful coaching conversations.

Expanding NIET’s Support for Higher Education with NIET PREP

Not only does NIET PREP house a resource library of videos, certification resources, and documents, but it also supports the *NIET Aspiring Teacher Rubric* and provides crosswalks with edTPA and the InTASC standards. The online platform also serves as an additional resource for faculty to support aspiring teachers in their coursework. One example of this is Northern Arizona University, where university leadership and faculty opened the portal to students in

450

Resources Available in NIET PREP

the college of education. With the expansion of access, mentors and university staff now assign students videos, presentations, or other resources on a specific content area for review and practice. We have seen a similar approach among other higher education partnerships, including Arizona State University, Marian University (Indiana), Southeastern Louisiana University, Texas Tech University, and Cumberland University in Tennessee.

NIET PREP is one of the many new ways that NIET is supporting higher education. We are continuing to focus on future innovations, such as helping with course mapping and induction, that will continue to make a meaningful difference in aspiring teacher preparation. Look for more in 2022.

SAVE THE DATE
NIET 2022 National Conference

March 10-11, 2022
Gaylord Texan | Dallas, Texas

Learn more and register at NIET.org

