

## FEATURE STORY

# 25 Years, 25 Ways to Improve

NIET has been leading efforts to improve instruction and equip both teachers and students for a quarter-century now, and while there are no shortcuts to success, we share guidance and reminders to help teachers and leaders from states, districts, schools, and universities keep their compasses pointed north.



*Louisiana educators meet to review high-quality instructional materials.*

Desert View Elementary School,  
Gadsden Elementary School  
District #32, Arizona



## 5 WAYS TO ADVANCE VISIONARY STATE LEADERSHIP

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**ADVANCE THE USE OF STRATEGIC STAFFING TO GIVE EVERY STUDENT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCCESS** by creating formal teacher leadership roles, defining teacher leadership standards, and supporting the development of educator career pathways.

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**BUILD A COMMON LANGUAGE AND SET EXPECTATIONS FOR STRONG TEACHING** by supporting the adoption of proven, research-based instructional frameworks and high-quality instructional materials.

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**ELEVATE THE PROFESSION BY RECOGNIZING AND REWARDING SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS** who are making the greatest gains, then share their practices statewide.

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**STRENGTHEN MENTORING AND INDUCTION PROGRAMS** by promoting the intentional selection and training of mentors and integrating mentoring into professional learning systems.

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**DEVELOP INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAMS** at the district and school levels by offering training and support on the use of effective protocols, tools, and resources.

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## 5 WAYS TO DRIVE DISTRICT-WIDE SUCCESS

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**BUILD A DISTRICT-WIDE VISION FOR SUPPORTING THE SUCCESS OF EVERY STUDENT** using high-quality instructional materials and evidence-based practices that close learning gaps for historically marginalized students.

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**IMPROVE SYSTEMS FOR EDUCATOR OBSERVATION, EVALUATION, AND COACHING** to support growth and raise the level of instructional excellence across classrooms and buildings.

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**ADOPT LEADERSHIP STANDARDS AND STRATEGIES** to grow principals as instructional leaders, helping them to communicate goals and priorities, monitor progress, celebrate successes, make strategic adjustments, and support collective ownership of objectives.

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**DEDICATE DISTRICT INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF TO CREATE SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT FOR PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOLS.** Dissolving silos and redefining instructional roles at the district office will create the opportunity to increase coaching for school leaders to improve instruction, accelerate learning, and eliminate equity gaps.

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**UTILIZE RESOURCES AND TALENT TO SUPPORT THE HIGHEST-NEED SCHOOLS** and to fund the instructional vision, priorities, and support systems necessary for all schools to improve teaching and learning.

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Henry Burkhart Elementary School, Perry Township Schools, Indiana

## 5 WAYS TO EMPOWER PRINCIPALS AS LEAD LEARNERS

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**ESTABLISH GREAT CLASSROOM TEACHING AS THE CENTERPIECE OF EVERY SCHOOL.** Focusing on the most important work of schools — great teaching and learning — is the most direct path to giving all students the best opportunity for success. School leaders communicate a vision for supporting all students to access grade-level learning through high-quality instructional materials and practices.

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**“GO FIRST” AND MODEL BEING A LEAD LEARNER.** School leaders can demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement and growth by spending time in classrooms to identify challenges and grounding their coaching and feedback in the curriculum.

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**CREATE TIME, STRUCTURES, AND FORMAL ROLES FOR ONGOING, SCHOOL-BASED COLLABORATIVE LEARNING** that helps teachers understand the connection between their instructional practice and student outcomes. Engaging teacher leaders in planning and facilitating professional learning provides new opportunities for collaboration and coaching.

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Winona Middle School, Winona Independent School District, Texas

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**DEVELOP TEACHER LEADER ROLES DESIGNED TO SYSTEMATICALLY AND RELIABLY IMPROVE TEACHING AND ACCELERATE STUDENT LEARNING.**

Teacher leaders should have significant responsibility for leading collaborative learning teams, conducting observations to provide actionable feedback to teachers, modeling effective instructional practice in classrooms, and engaging in classroom-based coaching.

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**INVEST IN BUILDING THE TALENT PIPELINE** by strengthening partnerships with educator preparation programs and creating support structures for new teachers from a diversity of preparation pathways.

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## 5 WAYS TO EQUIP TEACHERS AND TEACHER LEADERS FOR EXCELLENCE

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**CULTIVATE A GROWTH MINDSET AND CHOOSE TO TEACH STUDENTS WITH THE GREATEST NEEDS.** Recognizing and celebrating each student's learning and how it is building toward success will foster stronger relationships and school communities.

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**BE INNOVATIVE AND USE DATA TO DRIVE INSTRUCTION.** Reflecting on instructional practices and student outcomes creates an example for students of how to understand and learn from their own data and work.

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**ASSESS THE NEEDS AND STRENGTHS OF EACH STUDENT AND LET THOSE DRIVE EFFORTS.** Research-based practices and strategies are most effective when implemented in ways that address the unique needs of students and capitalize on the strengths of the community.

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**ENGAGE OTHER EDUCATORS, PARENTS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS** in the work of improving teaching and learning, building on community values and resources, and supporting student success.

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**TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE SCHOOL AND DISTRICT.** Research and experience have shown that leadership is not a zero-sum quantity in schools. Taking on a leadership role enhances, rather than limits, opportunities for other teachers to engage in leadership.

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## 5 WAYS TO BUILD THE NEXT GENERATION OF EDUCATORS

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**BUILD NEW TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF EXCELLENT INSTRUCTION** by using a research-based instructional framework or rubric in coursework and student teaching practice.

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**PARTNER WITH SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO STRENGTHEN SUPPORT FOR NEW TEACHERS** through collaborative learning and coaching. By working in partnership with districts, educator preparation programs can better prepare new teachers to meet the needs of students and contribute the expertise of program leaders to school districts.

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**PREPARE TEACHERS FOR LEADERSHIP ROLES FOCUSED ON INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT.** Teacher leadership requires new skills and knowledge. Schools of education can train teacher leaders in areas such as leading collaborative teams, observing classroom lessons and sharing feedback, and providing individualized coaching.

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**TRAIN NEW PRINCIPALS TO BE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS** and to manage instructional leadership teams. Use research-based leadership standards to define effective practices, meet the needs of diverse learners, engage teacher leaders, and provide clear priorities for principals' instructional leadership.

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**RESEARCH THE MOST IMPACTFUL PRACTICES IN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP.** District and school leaders are looking for information on the effectiveness of models, practices, or strategies, and universities play an important role in identifying what works for specific groups of students and teachers. ●

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