

FEATURE STORY

Five Ways to Keep New Teachers in the Profession



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

All teachers benefit from mentoring, support, and guidance — especially those who are stepping into their roles for the first time. Providing support for new teachers is a top priority for NIET and our partners, so we are always asking ourselves:

How can we create a system that helps teachers thrive so that every student can achieve?

Just as we must continue to make the improvements we know students need to succeed, we must also identify and work to provide new teachers with the support they need to be

successful. We have seen time and time again that one of the greatest benefits new educators can receive is support from teacher leaders who were once in their shoes.

During the 2023-24 school year, we held a series of focus groups with new teachers from across

Arizona to pinpoint exactly why teacher leaders are so helpful to new teachers. The new teachers shared insights with us 100 days into their first year in the classroom and again at the end of the school year. Ultimately, they identified five key ways in which teacher leaders helped them thrive.



INCREASE FEEDBACK AND REDUCE ISOLATION

We have noted that strong onboarding helps new team members learn the culture of their school, understand their role, work more cohesively, achieve greater results, and stay in the profession longer.

Many new teachers in NIET partner schools brought up the importance of having a master teacher coach them on classroom instruction, incorporating the benefit of having in-person observation followed by personalized feedback. The more detailed and constructive feedback new teachers receive from teacher leaders, the more new teachers have to work with when it comes to improving their instruction.

One new teacher shared, “I like the observations because I appreciate the feedback. What did I do wrong? What can I do right? Their suggestions helped me step up my game, and I appreciate and am open to that. It makes you a better teacher.”

Feedback can also help eliminate feelings of isolation. When teachers share strategies with their peers, they have the opportunity to collaborate in teams, building a community of support around new teachers when they need it most.

2

BUILD CONFIDENCE THROUGH CLEARLY DEFINED INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

New teachers emphasize the value of learning best practices from mentor teachers with a wealth of localized experience. When teacher leaders put themselves into the shoes of new teachers, their feedback and instruction become significantly more targeted, defined, and applicable to the classroom, offering new teachers a sense of confidence and fortification. During our focus groups, a new teacher said, “It is really nice having mentor teachers that are at our school and know how to implement the things they are talking about at these meetings straight into our classrooms.”

The coaching and feedback that teacher leaders provide are strengthened even more when schools use a rubric to create a common language. A detailed, research-based resource such as the NIET *Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric* allows teachers to analyze their own instructional lessons and refer to specific domains and indicators during collaboration and professional development with peers. “You have an opportunity to start looking at your lesson plans a little differently,” said a focus group teacher.

When combined with coaching from mentor teachers, the instructions and practices found in the NIET rubric assist new teachers with the professional growth that so many look for in their first year.



Somerset High School, Somerset
Independent School District, Texas



Slaughter Elementary School,
East Feliciana Public Schools, Louisiana

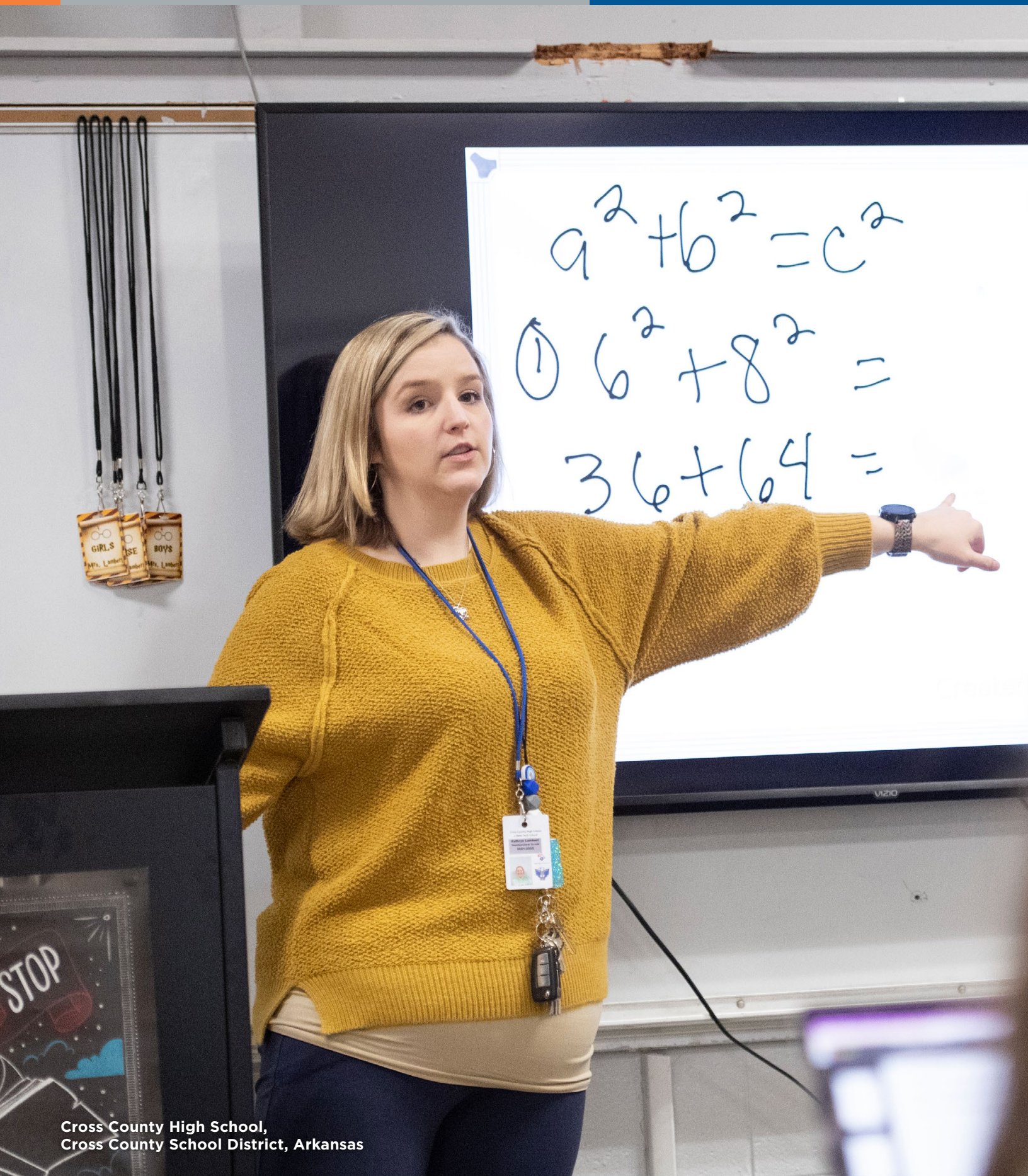
3

STAY POSITIVE AND CELEBRATE GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

Another thing we know for sure? Supportive school environments attract and retain teachers, especially new ones. During one of our focus groups, the words “help” and “support” came up 75 times.

Students are not the only ones who thrive with encouragement and assurance; teachers and school leaders also find inspiration, motivation, and validation in positive environments. While participating in the focus groups, new teachers who had never met built off one another’s answers, complimented one another, and compared experiences and struggles — and all the new teachers agreed that taking moments to reflect on positivity in the classroom allows them to center themselves and rediscover the joy of teaching. “It is always nice to hear a compliment,” one teacher shared. “I feel like I am very hard on myself, so honestly, hearing the positives means so much.”

We must create and protect spaces where new teachers can find positives within the profession. It might look like setting aside time weekly to review best practices and answer questions. Or it might look like a kind note from a mentor or district leader who sees a teacher putting forth their best effort or making strides.



Cross County High School,
Cross County School District, Arkansas

4

FOSTER LEADERSHIP TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTION

Time and time again, new teachers cite the helpfulness of mentoring during their first year in the classroom. Much of the support they receive comes from more experienced teachers who have learned school culture and then passed along analytical and data-driven approaches to instructional practices that grow student achievement.

As we recognize the critical role that kind of mentorship has in the first year of a new teacher's career, we also must be mindful of fostering those leadership qualities and creating opportunities for new mentors to emerge, promoting the cycle of professional growth and support in our schools.

Everyone has varying abilities, strengths, and approaches to leadership. When implemented effectively, teacher leadership roles impact entire school communities. Teacher leaders field-test strategies in their classrooms, and when they share results and promote collaboration, they empower the rest of the school staff to follow in their footsteps.

Ultimately, the impacts of teacher leaders are what inspire the next cycle of teachers to continue improving instructional strategies and pursue professional pathways. When new teachers see the impact mentor and master teachers have on how they approach classroom instruction, they are inspired to strengthen their practices and develop leadership skills so they can similarly support their teammates.

5

PRIORITIZE NEW TEACHERS BY SUPPORTING TEACHER LEADERS

Schools can invest in teacher leadership roles as a form of schoolwide support, promoting a system of collaboration and helping new teachers transition from being in class to teaching their own. To invest in teachers at all stages of their careers:

Focus mentoring on instructional improvement.

Mentoring is most effective when it is grounded in student outcomes and the instructional needs of the new teacher. Schools can support this by adopting a cycle of coaching for continuous improvement and creating opportunities for mentors to collaborate on instructional and coaching best practices. This will foster a growth mindset among new teachers and mentors alike.

Support mentors to be more effective by giving them what they need to succeed.

Successful mentor programs have a clear purpose and a vision for improving teaching and learning. They include dedicated time and training for mentorship, an evidence-based instructional rubric, and clearly defined mentor roles that include additional compensation.

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

Mentoring must be tied to school, district, and state initiatives, and mentors should be connected to the school leadership team. When districts support teacher leaders and integrate them into the school leadership structure, it keeps the mentoring program in line with district and school priorities.



Lake Marion High School, Orangeburg County School District, South Carolina

Research and our experiences continually show that when new teachers lack support, a positive environment, leadership, and recognition, retention suffers. At NIET, we are proud to support and partner with those who meet this challenge head-on: successful district leaders, school leaders, teacher leaders, and university and state leaders. We know that when we learn from one another, we will continue supporting new teachers to be successful from day one. ●