

In Conversation

DR. MIKE HERNANDEZ

Dr. Mike Hernandez is the executive director of the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, a statewide organization that offers networking and professional learning opportunities to school district leaders.



How has NIET played a role in strengthening education in your state?

My involvement with NIET started through the Arkansas Rural Educator Network, an initiative helping rural school and district leaders respond to the challenges of the pandemic and post-pandemic period. NIET provided leaders with research-based, practical strategies for improving classroom instruction across their buildings and districts. Through the network, NIET created a forum for rural leaders to connect and collaborate around their biggest challenges. Several of the districts achieved strong results by including teacher leaders

on school leadership teams to strengthen professional learning and classroom coaching. The relationships forged by that network endured, and the focus on teacher leadership is reflected in recent statewide initiatives to recognize and engage teacher leaders in improving teaching and learning.

In what ways has NIET contributed to building the skills and knowledge of your members?

My organization provides a year of intensive support to new superintendents to help them master the many aspects of the role and to create a foundation for growth and success. We partner with NIET to offer superintendents an opportunity to continue to grow and improve through two additional years of coaching. Every leader benefits from coaching, and it is especially valuable for rural leaders, who have fewer opportunities for collaboration and professional learning. NIET's one-on-one support is helping superintendents build instructional leadership capacity among their own teams. One of the most

important things NIET brings to the table is a commitment to growth and improvement.

What should NIET focus on in our next 25 years?

The vision of NIET has never been more relevant than right now. Across our state, we need to continue efforts to ensure that every student is taught by an exceptional teacher and that those teachers have the support of a quality leader. NIET should double down on its efforts to support teachers and leaders due to rising turnover in the education ranks. I have seen firsthand the diligent work that NIET has done to help educators in our state and would hope that they stay the course for years to come. ●