

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 5, 2021

CONTACT: Sara Gast
sgast@niet.org, 913-226-8665

NIET, Texas School Districts Awarded \$12 Million Federal Grant to Support Educators, Strengthen Teaching and Learning

Texas IMPACT grant designed to accelerate learning recovery in 19 high-need schools across Crockett, Gladewater, Slaton and Somerset ISD

The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) announced today that it has been awarded a three-year, \$12 million grant from the federal Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program to partner with the Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity (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, a national nonprofit that has strengthened teaching in high-need schools in Texas and across the country for more than 20 years, 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 have experience implementing innovative instructional strategies to improve student achievement. These four anchor districts from east, south, and west Texas regions will serve as models to other small districts within their regions, statewide, and nationally on how to strengthen support for educators.

“This Teacher and School Leader federal grant will help accelerate Texas' learning recovery and target support in the areas with the most need,” said NIET Co-President and Chief Operating Officer Josh Barnett. “We are excited for this opportunity to partner together and build on the strengths in these schools to show what is possible when every educator is supported and every student can learn from a world-class teacher.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in learning loss across the country. According to the most recent data from the Texas Education Agency, in Texas, students experienced large learning declines in all subjects, especially in mathematics, where only 35% of students met grade-level expectations in 2021, compared to 50% in 2019. The key to turning around learning loss is to have the most effective teachers in front of the students who have lost the most. Unfortunately, research shows that it is often the case that the least experienced teachers are placed in the most challenging schools, where students are likely to have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The four districts in this grant have high populations of students from families who face economic challenges, with the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged ranging from 73-89%.

The Texas IMPACT partnership will work to combat learning losses in 19 high-need schools through evidence-based strategies, including creating roles and opportunities for teacher leaders, providing customized professional learning to teachers during the school day, using an instructional rubric to ground teaching in research-based practices, and creating a system of performance-based compensation that rewards teachers who show growth or take on additional responsibilities. To align these strategies, the districts will use NIET's TAP

System, which has been shown to increase the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders, increase educator retention, as well as attract effective educators.

“We are excited to collaborate alongside educators in these four school districts to help them take their instruction to the next level,” said NIET Co-President Laura Encalade. “This is an opportunity to help teachers and students change their trajectory in a way that not only results in improvements a year from now, but also sets them up with tools that will equip them to grow for years to come.”

Additionally, BranchED will provide professional learning and coaching to help district leaders and educators focus on building culturally responsive teachers and school leaders who create inclusive school environments where educators are equipped and empowered to embrace identity and diversity as an asset for learning.

“The communities that have been most impacted by the pandemic can maximize investments like these to accelerate recovery,” said Dr. Cassandra Herring, President and CEO of BranchED. “We are proud to be part of this partnership and provide support for educators in Crockett, Gladewater, Slaton and Somerset that will help to create school cultures where every student is able to thrive.”

The four district partners of Texas IMPACT all face unique challenges, including achievement gaps between different student groups and competition from nearby areas for high-quality teachers. The support they receive from the grant will provide them with a system that addresses those issues in addition to the learning loss from the pandemic.

“This is a huge opportunity for teachers and students in Crockett ISD,” said Crockett ISD Superintendent John Emerich. “We see this as an investment in our educators that will better equip us to meet the incredible needs presented by the pandemic and empower our teachers to accelerate improvements in student achievement long-term.”

“Texas IMPACT is a chance for rural communities like ours to receive access to resources we otherwise would not be able to receive,” said Gladewater ISD Superintendent Sedric G. Clark. “Our school community has been resilient through the pandemic, and this investment will help us to strengthen our recovery efforts and double-down on our work to make this school year the best ever.”

“Slaton has always been committed to supporting our teachers and giving them opportunities to learn and grow so every student is able to be successful,” said Slaton ISD Superintendent Jim Andrus. “We will use this grant investment as an opportunity to continue to strengthen what we do every day and expand our vision on what is possible for students to achieve.”

“Our district took a proactive stance by implementing weekly COVID screenings for all students and staff last fall, and we are proud to have been recognized as one of seven districts in Texas that actually showed increases in reading and math STAAR scores this past spring,” said Somerset ISD Superintendent Saul Hinojosa. “We continue to refine and strengthen our system with a clear focus on academics and student growth, and this grant will ensure we create school cultures where teachers are fully supported and vested and where all students – especially those in disadvantaged communities – are performing at their fullest potential.”



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

The grant partnership will launch this fall. In the coming days, NIET team members will begin meeting with districts and start planning for implementation, including designing custom professional learning and coaching plans for the rest of the school year. For updates, please visit [NIET.org](https://niet.org).

###

About NIET

For two decades, NIET has partnered with schools, districts, states, and universities to build educator excellence and give all students the opportunity for success. NIET's initiatives, including TAP, teacher and leader development, school improvement, rubric and observation systems, and educator preparation, have impacted more than 275,000 educators and 2.75 million students across the U.S. Learn more at niet.org.