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**LOCKETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SELECTED AS FINALIST FOR NATIONAL
INSTITUTE FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING'S FOUNDER'S AWARD, \$10,000 CASH
PRIZE**

***School one of five nationwide recognized for outstanding efforts to foster educator excellence
and advance student success, contending for \$50,000 grand prize***

ORANGEBURG, S.C. – The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) announced today that Lockett Elementary School in Orangeburg County, South Carolina, won \$10,000 for its selection as an NIET Founder's Award finalist. The prestigious Founder's Award was created by Lowell Milken in 2008 to honor one school in the United States each year for exceptional implementation of NIET's principles to build educator excellence and advance student success. Lockett Elementary School is among five schools across the country under consideration for the \$50,000 grand prize, which will be announced at the NIET's national conference on February 29.

"For Lockett Elementary School, 'Dedicated to Excellence' is more than a motto. It is a mindset that all educators embrace to create high-quality educational opportunities for students," said NIET Founder Lowell Milken. "This collective focus on building teacher talent – and the structure to sustain it – is made possible by strong instructional leadership at the school and district. We applaud Principal Chasity Fralix – a Lockett graduate herself – her staff, and Superintendent Dr. Shawn Foster for investing in teacher effectiveness to attain achievement growth."

Founder's Award finalists like Lockett Elementary School are selected by NIET based on several factors, including their efforts to make instructional excellence the cornerstone of school improvement, plans for regular professional learning focused on the real-time needs of teachers and students, creating a culture of collaboration and reflection, and leveraging teacher leaders and administrators to drive student growth.

NIET's partner schools have improved outcomes for educators, students and schools. Lockett Elementary School has continuously elevated teaching and learning using NIET's tools and resources to support instructional excellence and create career pathways.

"Lockett Elementary strengthened their school leadership team to ensure that the most effective teaching practices were shared across classrooms," said NIET Chief Executive Officer Dr. Joshua Barnett. "The result of this commitment is reflected in Lockett's student achievement. In 2023, the school received the highest rating in South Carolina's education accountability system and was one of only two schools in Orangeburg County School District to receive an overall rating of 'Excellent'."

What Makes Lockett Elementary School Unique?

Lockett Elementary School, set in rural South Carolina's Orangeburg County School District, educates 236 students in pre-kindergarten through 5th grade with 64% of students qualifying as "pupils in poverty." With help from NIET, Lockett Elementary changed its culture to focus on growth, feedback and reflection around academic goals and student needs. Principal Chasity Fralix and her leadership team have prioritized building the reflective practices of teachers and strengthening professional learning meetings to ensure every student receives high-quality instruction.

"Lockett has always had a family culture," said Fralix. "Now, though, we are growing in our ability to give feedback. We understand that we want to grow together and that we all have room to grow, and we know that we can learn from each other."

Lockett Elementary School has established NIET structures and best practices, including weekly professional learning meetings, individualized coaching and support for teachers, and a distributed leadership model, with teacher effectiveness and student achievement increasing as a result.

In 2023, Lockett Elementary School received an overall rating of "Excellent," the highest rating in South Carolina's education accountability system, an improvement from the 2022 rating of "Good." Additionally, Lockett students outperformed students statewide in English language arts and math on the 2022 and 2023 South Carolina College- and Career-Ready Assessments. From 2021 to 2023, the percentage of Lockett students meeting or exceeding expectations on the state assessment increased in both English language arts and math.

Teachers benefit from weekly professional learning meetings that are focused on developing effective lesson plans that provide rigorous instruction to all students, and during these meetings, teachers deconstruct academic standards and use student work and assessments to

refine instructional strategies. The weekly meetings, guided by data and structured according to NIET's Five Steps for Effective Learning, foster a dedicated space for learning and collaboration. This intentional focus has resulted in robust instructional practices tailored to meet the diverse learning needs of all students.

"The Five Steps for Effective Learning structure brought about positive changes to our instructional leadership team meetings and professional learning community meetings, requiring me to stretch my abilities and step out of my comfort zone," said Fralix. "As a first-year principal, I made instructional changes through data to improve teaching and learning, resulting in a rating of 'excellent'."

School leaders and teachers are also working to increase student engagement by conducting monthly "student data notebook chats," during which they meet with their teachers to discuss their individual data, where they have excelled, and where there is room for improvement, allowing students to reflect on their progress throughout the school year.

"We started implementing data talks between teachers and students," said Fralix. "Once a month, teachers conference individually with every student in their class and talk about their data. Students are setting their own goals now—they look forward to mapping and seeing their growth."

Lockett Elementary School joins fellow finalists Clinton Elementary School (Clinton City Schools, Tennessee); Desert View Elementary School (Gadsden Elementary School District #32, Arizona); North DeSoto High School (DeSoto Parish Schools, Louisiana); and Winona Middle School (Winona Independent School District, Texas) in contention for the \$50,000 Founder's Award grand prize.

For images of Lockett Elementary School and more information about the NIET Founder's Award, visit the NIET newsroom. For interviews with Lockett Elementary School, please contact PJ Walker, pervis.walkerjr@ocsdsc.org

Orangeburg County School District

The mission of Orangeburg County School District, the catalyst of innovation and excellence, is to ensure all students discover and develop their person, purpose, and platform through high-quality educational experiences distinguished by a culture of collaboration, equity, and inclusion; a creative learning environment with inspiring opportunities; a commitment to nurture the academic, physical, social and emotional well-being of all. Visit us online at ocsdsc.org

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