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## **(A) Need for Project**

### **(i) Specific gaps have been identified and will be addressed by the project**

The applicant, Pitt County Schools (PCS), is a Local Education Agency (LEA) serving 23,300 students living in Pitt County, North Carolina. The LEA operates 38 schools of varying grade ranges throughout the 655 square-mile county. The project, *Recruit, Retain, Reward (R3) Phase II: Cultivating Exponential Leaders and Highly Effective Systems*, responds to both Absolute Priorities and both Competitive Preference Priorities. In response to Absolute Priority 1, we are proposing to expand our *R3* Human Capital Management System (HCMS) and Performance-Based Compensation System (PBCS) to include school executives and other instructional leaders not currently included in the *R3* model. In response to Absolute Priority 2, the project targets 27 schools (or 71% of the district) that meet the definition of “High-Need,” as documented Appendix E, in Table 1. Regarding the two Competitive Preference Priorities, the district will expand current programs and create new ones to increase the number and percentage of well-prepared, experienced, effective, and diverse educators who work with students at High-Need schools, including addressing issues to better recruit and retain a diverse workforce. A list of program objectives for this proposal, including page references, and their alignment with the respective Competitive Preference Priorities is included in Appendix E, Table 2.

Pitt County is located in the state’s coastal plain region. The county’s estimated population in July 2019 was 180,742, approximately half of which resides in the City of Greenville. The remainder of county residents live in small towns and unincorporated communities surrounding this urban hub. Greenville is the county seat and home of East Carolina University (ECU), the fourth largest public university in North Carolina. Vidant Health, a not-for-profit health system headquartered in Greenville, is the largest private employer in

eastern North Carolina, with over 12,000 employees in its 29-county service region. Other employment sectors in Pitt County include manufacturing and fabrication; pharmaceutical and chemical production; agricultural and natural resource processing; marketing and retail sales; and service industries.

Despite its status as the center of education, commerce, employment, and health care in eastern North Carolina, Pitt County posts poverty rates of 19.6% for individuals of all ages and 24.2% for children under 18 years of age (U.S. Census, 2019 ACS 1-Year Estimates). At 27 of the district's schools, more than 50% of students qualified for free or reduced-price school meals in 2020-2021 and all students at 24 of these High-Need schools received free breakfast and lunch through the Community Eligibility Provision of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010. All the district's Low Performing Schools in 2018-19 were "High Need" (see Appendix E, Table 1).

These data are consistent with long-term trends in PCS and across the nation, revealing a correlation between academic achievement and family income. The racial/ethnic composition of the district's student population is 45.6% African American, 34.9% White, 12.4% Hispanic, 5.1% Multi-Racial and 1.84% Other. Pitt County Schools operated under a 1970 federal court desegregation order until it was declared compliant and released from the court order in 2015. Shortly thereafter, the final version of North Carolina's Equity Plan was published, revealing that PCS was among 15 LEAs with the highest number of majority-minority schools. In PCS, more than 69% students were from races and ethnicities other than White non-Hispanic. Pitt County students attending high minority schools were more likely to be taught by less qualified teachers, despite the proximity of the ECU College of Education in Greenville, which has historically vied with Appalachian State University as the leading producer of educators in North Carolina.

North Carolina uses an A-F letter system to grade schools in the state. Seven High-Need schools in the LEA were classified as Low Performing in 2018-19, the most recent year for which data are available, and only two High-Need schools received a grade above C. In 25 of the 27 High-Need schools, the majority of students are from racial and ethnic minorities. Among the 11 schools at which less than 50% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, seven achieved a performance grade of A or B and the remainder earned a C. In the seven schools rated A or B, in all but one, the majority of students are White non-Hispanic. There has been improvement among schools on this grading scale although there remains work to be done. From 2017-2018 to 2018-2019, the greatest upward movement in school performance grades was from grade D to C. Specifically, 40% of schools had a grade of D in 2017-2018, while in 2018-19 the percentage of schools rated D dropped in half to 20%. Concurrently, 58% of schools received a C in 2018-2019, which is up 21 percentage points from the prior year. PCS attributes these improvements in large part to the work that has been done around equipping and training teachers to focus on instructional practice, and to the work of teacher leaders in the *R3* model, funded through the TIF grant awarded to the LEA in 2016.

The state uses a rubric and procedure for teacher evaluation referred to as the North Carolina Educator Effectiveness System (NCEES). Teachers are rated on five standards, with independent ratings for each standard. Ratings range from “Developing” to “Distinguished.” Data indicate that teachers at Non-High-Need schools are consistently rated higher than teachers at High-Need schools. Students at the neediest schools require highly effective teachers in order to bridge the achievement gap many experience when compared to their peers (O’Day & Smith, 2016), but our data indicate the most effective teachers are generally clustered at Non-High Need schools. In fact, for 2021, there is an average 21.75 percentage-point gap between the teachers

rated “Accomplished” or higher (the two highest levels on the rubric) at High-Need and Non-High-Need schools. When examining the number of teachers who received the *lowest* rating on the rubric (Developing or Not-Demonstrated), the gap is even more pronounced. Between 87-95% (depending on the individual standard) of teachers with one of the two lowest ratings are at a school identified as High-Need. Data for all the standards are listed in Appendix E, Tables 3 and 4.

Similar trends are found for school executives defined as principals and assistant principals (APs). As illustrated in Tables 5 and 6 (Appendix E), for 2021 there is a gap of between 22-38 percentage points between the ratings of school executives at High-Need schools versus Non-High-Need schools. Whereas the vast majority of school executives at Non-High-Need schools are rated at one of the two highest levels (on all but one standard are 60% or higher, and the remaining one is 58%), at High-Need schools the number of school executives rated at one of the two highest ratings is in the minority on all but two standards. Even more telling, for school executives receiving one of the lowest two ratings on the evaluation instrument, **100% of them serve at High-Need schools.**

School executives (principals and assistant principals) are responsible for observing and evaluating the teachers in their schools. Beginning teachers, teachers on improvement plans, and teachers in their renewal year are placed on a full observation cycle, which involves a minimum of four full classroom observations, each a minimum of 45 minutes, plus a pre- and post-conference, and a final rating on all five NCEES standards. In contrast, teachers on an abbreviated observation cycle require only two observations, each a minimum of 45 minutes. In general, High-Need schools employ more beginning teachers and teachers on improvement plans than schools considered Non-High-Need. In 2021, 48% of teachers in High-Need schools were

on a full observation cycle compared with 33% of teachers at Non-High-Need schools. This means that school executives at High-Need schools have significantly more teachers at their schools requiring a full cycle, and each of those cycles takes nine times longer to complete than the abbreviated cycle. Compounding the challenge is that High-Need schools are generally led by school executives who are consistently rated lower on their own evaluations. In other words, school executives at High-Need schools, who are not rated as highly as their peers at Non-High-Need Schools, also have more evaluations to do, which take longer, and the teachers they lead require more support. This triple-challenge (less effective school executive, more needy teacher, and more time-consuming evaluation process) forms a perfect storm, greatly inhibiting the ability for school executives at High-Need schools to complete other tasks required of them as an instructional leader. For this reason, *R3 Phase II* focuses on building the skills and capacities of school executives and mentors, who will then be better positioned to support teachers at their schools, who are then better empowered to increase student achievement.

Pitt County Schools launched the *R3 Framework: Recruit, Retain, Reward* in 2013, an innovative, relevant, and cost-effective Human Capital Management System (HCMS) to reduce teacher turnover and promote equity among all schools in the district by combining opportunities for exponential influence, increased compensation, and differentiated and advanced teaching positions. This HCMS began by *recruiting* the best candidates from across the state and nation to become classroom teachers in Pitt County and *recruiting* teachers from within the district to become teacher leaders at the school and district level. Through intensive professional learning and leadership opportunities (both formal and informal), PCS strives to *retain* the best teachers and grow them into leaders. Retaining effective, experienced teachers has a significant impact on student learning. A student of an effective teacher may achieve a gain of 1.5 grade level

equivalents while students with an ineffective teacher will only gain a 0.5 grade level equivalent during a single academic year, with minority and economically disadvantaged inner-city students being more vulnerable to that difference because they can't overcome the difference at home (Hanushek, 2014). Finally, PCS *rewards* excellent teachers through monetary and non-monetary incentives as they progress through different career pathways, addressing their needs for autonomy, mastery, and purpose (Pink, 2011) by offering opportunities to choose responsibilities and positions that align with their strengths, interests, and school district needs.

In 2016, Pitt County Schools was a recipient of a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant, which enabled PCS to deploy aspects of the R3 Framework, including the PBCS. Having completed its fifth and final year, the work done through the TIF grant has had a positive and transformational impact on teacher leadership, teacher collaboration, teacher retention, and student learning in the district. *R3 Phase I* included a robust plan to provide differentiated career pathways which enabled and empowered teachers to remain in the classroom working with students while receiving differentiated pay for differentiated roles and responsibilities as well as annual one-time performance bonuses. Since the 2014-2015 school year, our annual attrition rate has continually decreased, which we attribute in large part to the *R3: Recruit, Retain, Reward Framework*. In 2014-2015 our attrition rate was 17.46%, higher than the state average. After the district's sustained focus on teacher retention, the 2018-19 attrition rate of 11.55% was below the state average (most recent data available). Additionally, our retention rate for teachers serving in advanced teaching roles was 92% from 2017-18 to 2018-19, compared to the district average of approximately 80% for general teacher retention (Measurement Inc., 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b).

PCS's TIF grant provided a firm foundation in our district for leadership career pathways within the classroom. Five critical lessons we learned through TIF were:

- TIF Lesson 1: The implementation of advanced teaching roles has positively impacted teaching and learning and caused other educators to desire advanced roles and collaboration opportunities.
- TIF Lesson 2: Coaching for teachers in advanced roles was critical for their growth, support, and success, which led to both programmatic success and increases in student learning.
- TIF Lesson 3: Program success was supported and empowered by a focus on developing both a system of teacher leadership and individual teacher leaders, specifically by creating (1) consistent learning tracks for teachers in advanced roles; (2) individualized training plans for teachers once they moved into those roles; and (3) alignment between job expectations, performance evaluation, and professional learning.
- TIF Lesson 4: Iterative inquiry cycles including ongoing, external, formative, and summative program evaluation was critical to program success.
- TIF Lesson 5: Creating more equitable systems requires a focus on both equitable opportunities and equitable results.

The *R3* program currently focuses on three strands: differentiated career pathways for formal teacher leaders across the system, a leadership pipeline development program, and the opportunity for teachers to earn annual performance-based bonuses. Now it is time to expand the work of the original TIF grant to address leaders outside the classroom and create multiple layers of support for all educators in the district. In *R3 Phase II, Cultivating Exponential Leaders and Highly Effective Systems*, we will offer new opportunities for educators to pursue differentiated



leadership opportunities outside the classroom (which include performance-based compensation), participate in a school leadership pipeline, and improve their instructional capacity leading to improved student achievement, in particular for educators at High-Need schools.

**(ii) The project will build on related efforts to improve Relevant Outcomes.**

*R3 Phase I* focused on designing advanced teaching roles as part of different pathways for teacher leaders. The aim was to provide a way for highly effective teachers to increase their compensation and influence while remaining in the classroom, and we are now successfully sustaining this *R3 Phase I* initiatives post-TIF-grant. Specifically, during the 21-22 school year, the first post-TIF grant year for the program, PCS will have over 60 Communities of Practice (CoPs) led by a Facilitating Teacher (FT) working with nearly 200 Collaborating Teachers (CT) to conduct collaborative inquiry around an identified problem of practice. PCS will also sustain our Co-Teaching model, which pairs a highly effective Multi-Classroom Teacher (MCT) with a novice or under-performing teacher to impact both teacher and student learning; for 21-22 we will have 13 MCTs supporting nearly 40 Co-Teachers, and 12 of those MCTs will be in High-Need schools. Finally, we will maintain our two teacher leadership pipeline programs. A driving purpose underlying *Phase I* was expanding the influence of highly effective teachers to reach both their peers and more students.

In *R3 Phase II*, PCS is building on what has been learned over the past several years to expand the program by including educators not originally eligible for advanced roles or performance-based compensation while we simultaneously restructure and solidify systems of support for all educators. The district is continuing the focus on developing the human capital of teachers in High-Need schools by providing mentoring and leader support while also providing

differentiated and advanced roles for those who support educator development. Additionally, the district has already hired 11 extra assistant principals to work at High-Need schools in an effort to provide additional support for our neediest students and teachers. These 11 APs will be paid for using non-federal funds and are included as part of our district match. As APs at High-Need schools, they will be members of the group of school executives who benefit directly from the support offered in *R3 Phase II*.

In this proposal, we will share our plan to focus the work of mentors and school executives on the development of the teachers they serve by creating aligned systems across the district to obtain more equitable outcomes. During *R3 Phase II* we will cultivate systems and structures which develop the skills and capabilities of mentors and school executives to lead learning organizations in which both students **and** teachers learn. Our basic theory of change is that students learn best when they have highly effective teachers who can consistently provide a guaranteed and viable curriculum through engaging instruction (Dufour, 1997, 2004; Dufour et al., 2010; Rowell et al., 2020). The role of mentors, school executives, and existing teacher leaders is to empower teachers with the skills and capabilities to deliver engaging instruction, and the role of district staff is to create the structures whereby these school-based leaders can empower teachers. Our intent in moving forward with Phase II of *R3* is fuller integration of the HCMS for all educators as we seek to meet the unique needs of every child.

In response to the Absolute Priorities, the two Competitive Preference Priorities, and our own learnings from TIF, we propose the following five objectives in *R3 Phase II*, each aligned to the lessons identified above. These objectives and goals will allow PCS to expand, refine, and further develop our HCMS and PBCS:

- TSL Objective 1: Expand the career pathway model to provide opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and career advancement for those who are not currently eligible for advanced roles (TIF Lesson 1):
  - Goal 1a: Establish a mentoring pathway for expert teachers to support beginning teachers pursuing initial certification and experienced teachers pursuing national board certification.
  - Goal 1b: Create a school executive pathway to better support and provide opportunities for advancement and leadership opportunities for assistant principals and principals to positively impact student achievement.
  - Goal 1c: Expand our Pitt County Schools Executive Leadership Program (a grow-your-own principal partnership with East Carolina University), which identifies and prepares outstanding teacher leaders by hiring them into assistant principal positions in the school system, plus paying their tuition, fees, and books to obtain their Master of School Administration degree.
  - Goal 1d: Implement Focused Inquiry Teams (FITs), based on improvement science methodology, for non-classroom based instructional personnel (i.e., school executives, guidance counselors, media coordinators, etc.) to address challenges at the system (i.e., school or district) level.
- TSL Objective 2: Create a culture of coaching for and among school executives to empower them to grow, develop, and support the capacity and skill of the district's human capital, especially teachers serving at High-Need schools (TIF Lesson 2):
  - Goal 2a: Implement a system of regular coaching for school executives, including hiring and training individuals whose focus is to coach school leaders.

- Goal 2b: Increase the coaching skills of school executives so they more effectively support instructional and non-instructional staff they lead.
- TSL Objective 3: Align professional learning, job expectations, and personnel evaluation to better support all staff (TIF Lesson 3):
  - Goal 3a: Implement a comprehensive, districtwide professional learning framework aligned to state and national standards.
  - Goal 3b: Develop a learning pathway for onboarding new staff to the district and existing staff in new positions, including specific trainings, delivery timelines, and delivery methods, aligned with expectations from the already existing job performance rubrics.
  - Goal 3c: Provide financial, mentoring, and coaching assistance and support to teachers at High-Need schools who are pursuing advanced national teacher certification.
- TSL Objective 4: Create an Office of Continuous Improvement and Program Effectiveness within the district to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of district programs AND support the district/individual schools in improving programs which lead to improved student learning, all through disciplined inquiry (TIF Lesson 4):
  - Goal 4a: Partner with a Tier I research university to empower and equip internal personnel to ongoing and long-term sustainment.
  - Goal 4b: Implement rapid-cycle testing and other tools from improvement science to quickly assess whether a change is an improvement.
  - Goal 4c: Create Networked Improvement Communities (NICs), made up of individual FITs, to speed collective learning.

- TSL Objective 5: Align and focus school and district efforts on equity, both in student learning and in adult leadership opportunities (TIF Lesson 5):
  - Goal 5a: Create and support district and school equity teams to identify current inequities and examine those inequities for potential contributing factors (including present practices, policies, and procedures).
  - Goal 5b: Empower individuals to better understand, respect, and adjust to both their own and others' uniqueness by offering culturally relevant professional learning opportunities for school and district staff.
  - Goal 5c: Equip and empower staff and students to hold respectful, meaningful, and behavior-changing conversations around issues of equity.
  - Goal 5d: Increase the number of educators of color in schools across the district through strategic recruitment, support, and pathway programs.

**(iii) The project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning.**

Our primary focus in *R3 Phase II* is to fully transition the school district into a learning ecosystem for both students and adults. Researchers have consistently shown (Donohoo & Velasco, 2016; Drago-Severson, 2009; Dufour et al., 2010; Fullan et al., 2015; Guskey, 2002; Harwell, 2003; Hirsh & Crow, 2017; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Killion & Roy, 2009; Rowell et al., 2020; Senge, 2012) that when adults are learning, students are learning as well. PCS will work to expand high-quality professional learning based on the National Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward et al., 2011). An HCMS designed around collaborative professional learning includes job-embedded, continuous, standards- and results-driven learning (Donohoo, 2014; Donohoo & Velasco, 2016; Dufour, 1997; Fullan et al., 2015; Killion & Roy, 2009; Rowell et al., 2020). The district already has a system-wide focus and framework for

Professional Learning Communities (Dufour, 2004), as well as a comprehensive Community of Practice (CoP) model (Donohoo, 2014; Donohoo & Velasco, 2016; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) empowering teachers to conduct ongoing, collaborative inquiry-based research around identified problems of practice which negatively impact student learning. In *Phase II* we will implement Focused Inquiry Teams (FITs) and Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) (Bryk et al., 2015) so that school executives and other instructional leaders can sustain innovative practices at the school and district level.

Additionally, a portion of grant funds will be used to hire and work with an professional learning outside consultant (selected through a competitive RFP process) to help us create universal expectations, standards, procedures, and a framework for professional learning, all aligned to the Standards of Professional Learning (Fullan et al., 2015; Hirsh et al., 2014; Hirsh & Crow, 2017; Killion & Roy, 2009; Learning Forward et al., 2011). Successful and consistent application of the professional learning standards will lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results.

*R3 Phase II* is perfectly aligned with and supported by the district's strategic plan. Adopted in the spring of 2021, the strategic plan describes the profile of a learner and identifies four broad goals:

1. Teaching, Learning, and Equity: Eliminate opportunity gaps by 2026.
2. Achievement: Improve school and district performance,
3. Human Capital: Increase educator preparedness to meet the needs of every student.
4. Community Engagement & Safety: Foster shared responsibility for student success

Within each of these goals are multiple objectives and strategies designed to empower us to reach our goals. An excerpt of the strategic plan, including goals and objectives is included in Appendix F.

**(iv) The design of the project will successfully address identified needs.**

A logic model, graphical model of the project, and project timeline are included in Appendix A. The guiding philosophy of *Cultivating Exponential Leaders and Highly Effective Systems* is that as we build the capacity of mentors and school leaders to grow teachers, those teachers then improve their classroom practice. Improved classroom practice results in improved student learning, and improved student learning results in improved teacher efficacy and satisfaction (Guskey, 2002).

**(B) Quality of the Project Design**

**(i) The project Demonstrates a Rationale (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).**

PCS has developed strategic levels of support to improve the capacity of teachers to positively impact student achievement. Researchers have identified multiple school-based roles key to improving instructional capacity resulting in improved student learning outcomes in a school. Teachers, teacher leaders, and the school executive team are vitally important to achieve this goal (Hirsh et al., 2014). In this section, we describe the process to accomplish this in detail. Further evidence of the rationale is embedded throughout our project design.

**(ii) The project includes a research-based plan for implementation and evaluation**

**Objective 1: Expand the Career Pathways Model.** Our first objective focuses on expanding opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and career advancement for school leaders and other non-classroom based instructional personnel. These educators are ineligible for advanced roles under the current model, which is limited to classroom teachers. Expansion of the

model will include the creation of two new pathways, one for mentors and one for school executives, providing opportunities for leadership and collaboration. We will also expand a grow-your-own principal program through a partnership with East Carolina University to prepare and place high-quality school executive candidates in Pitt County Schools. Finally, we will create Focused Inquiry Teams (FITs) for educators in instructional roles who are not traditional classroom teachers (e.g., school counselors, media coordinators, assistant principals, principals, etc.) and who can collaboratively address district-level challenges with peers across multiple schools. Our initial focus in TIF was working with classroom teachers only, and, as such, the vast majority of our Communities of Practice (CoPs) focused on addressing classroom problems of practice with teachers at the same school (Donohoo, 2014; Donohoo & Velasco, 2016; Hirsh & Crow, 2017; Wellman & Lipton, 2004; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Our new FITs will complement the work of CoPs in that CoPs will focus on narrow instructional problems of practice in individual classrooms while FITs will focus on larger challenges across the district. Graphical summaries of both the Mentoring and School Executive Pathways are included in Appendix F

**Goal 1a: *Implement a Teacher Mentoring Pathway.*** The Mentoring Pathway supports beginning and career teachers in improving student learning by providing targeted, differentiated support as they seek to grow their instructional capacity. Across the district, students at High-Need schools are consistently served by a higher percentage of teachers in their first three years (Beginning Teachers) and a lower percentage of teachers with National Board of Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS) certification, as illustrated in Tables 7-8 of Appendix E. Specifically, 23.8% of teachers at High-Need schools are Beginning Teachers, compared to only 15.4% of teachers at non-High-Need schools. Similarly, only 5.36% of teachers at High-Need



schools have NBPTS certification, compared to 22.1% of teachers at non-High-Need schools. The Mentoring Pathway provides targeted means to address this inequity by supporting beginning teachers (BT) or teachers pursuing NBPTS Certification.

The BT Mentor role is designed to onboard new educators by providing them with continuous, targeted, and individualized support. Teachers in the first three years of their career and teachers who lack certification from an accredited educator preparation program are both assigned a BT Mentor who meets with them monthly for targeted support, including the development and monitoring of an individual support plan. BT Mentors will receive specialized training on how to lead and mentor peers, which is different than leading as a supervisor. In order to serve as a mentor, teachers must be rated “Proficient” or higher on all standards of the NCEES evaluation rubric and be rated “Effective” or higher in student achievement. The number of BT Mentors at a school will be directly related to the number of teachers needing mentors, with a single BT Mentor serving 1-2 new teachers.

In addition to BT Mentors, each school will also have a School Lead Mentor (SLM) who manages and leads the formal mentoring program at the school level, including leading and supporting the individual BT Mentors. SLMs will receive an annual supplement between \$1,200 and \$2,000, depending on the number of BT Mentors they lead. SLMs examine data from monthly logs and individual support plans completed by BT Mentors, then plan for, design, and provide monthly teacher talks for all BTs at the school based on identified needs. To qualify for the role, SLMs must have served at least 3 years in the BT Mentor role and be rated as “Proficient” or higher on the NCEES evaluation rubric. North Carolina uses a value-added model to measure teacher effectiveness based on student learning data, and scores greater than -2.0 and less than +2.0 are considered “meeting growth;” scores greater than or equal to +2.0 are

considered “exceeds growth.” SLMs must have a score greater than or equal to “0” on this model, which places them in the top 50% of teachers in terms of student effectiveness scores. SLMs will also receive formal coaching from a district Career Pathway Specialist and specialized training in how to organize, manage, and lead a system of support at the school level.

Another option on the Mentoring Pathway is the NBPTS Mentor, who provides individualized and targeted support for educators seeking National Board Certification. NBPTS Mentors are assigned to every NBPTS candidate at a High-Need school and are offered to candidates from Non-High-Need schools if requested. In order to qualify to the position, teachers must be rated “Proficient” or higher on the NCEES evaluation, be rated “Effective” in terms of effectiveness with students, and hold current NBPTS certification. NBPTS Mentors receive a stipend of \$500 per candidate, with the potential to mentor up to two candidates per school year. They support candidates in completing each part of the certification process, including reviewing the portfolio and facilitating regular and ongoing work sessions. The State of North Carolina rewards teachers who obtain NBPTS certification with a 12% stipend above their regular salary, meaning the district is able to provide additional pay to teachers with NBPTS certification at no cost to the individual school system, ensuring sustainability of the program beyond the life of the grant.

***Goal 1b: Implement a School Executive Pathway.*** Both principals and assistant principals provide critical support in a school as managerial, instructional, and human resources leaders. Therefore, it is important to support and develop school executives so they are better able to complete the management tasks required for a school to operate, including the supervision of instruction, and lead and grow the people who teach the students (Breidenstein et al., 2012; Carr et al., 2005; Costa et al., 2013; Drago-Severson, 2012; Drago-Severson et al.,

2013, Killion & Roy, 2009). School executives serve as both instructional leaders and formal evaluators of teachers, so one aspect of our work with them is providing intense training and support on how to structure evaluation conversations for feedback and growth (Costa et al., 2013; Drago-Severson et al., 2013; Harkavy, 2007).

The PCS Department of Excellence, Equity, and Leadership has developed a model for transformational school leadership with three key strands focusing on 1) specific tasks to be



Figure 1: A model of professional learning for transformational school leaders

completed, 2) ideal processes to accomplish those tasks, and 3) supporting the people who complete the processes and accomplish the tasks. We label these three strands Task, Relationship, and Process, and they are illustrated in figure 1.

Our professional learning, coaching, and support for school executives focuses on developing leaders who can balance these three strands, knowing which “lever” to pull when in

order to achieve optimal results.

*AP Training and Mentoring.* APs support principals in the day-to-day management and vision setting for the school and require an expanded leadership skill set as they progress from AP to principal. Our work with APs has a dual focus: (1) help them master their current role as instructional, human resources, and managerial leaders while (2) preparing them to become principals in the future. Several features within the School Executive Pathway are designed to onboard and accelerate AP development. All APs receive monthly training targeting the NC School Executive Standards in a cohort model. As a way to expand our support for APs under TSL, we will provide formal mentors for APs at pivotal points in their career, specifically their first year and then again in later years for those who participate in *The Academy for*

*Transformational School Leaders*, a leadership academy for APs who intend to apply for the principalship within 18-24 months. Mentors for first year APs will have a minimum of three years' successful experience as an AP (with at least one full year at their current school), be rated "Proficient" or higher on all standards of the NC School Executive evaluation rubric, and be rated "Effective" in student achievement based on their school's student growth data. In return for their service as a mentor, they will receive a \$1,200 annual supplement per mentee, up to two mentees (\$2,400).

*The Academy for Transformational School Leaders*. For the past three years, high-performing APs have had the opportunity to participate in *The Academy for Transformational School Leaders*, a program originally designed to prepare APs for the principalship by focusing on APs who were about 18 months out from applying to become a principal. Upon acceptance into this 18-month program, APs participated in a rigorous training program where they learned to master the skills necessary for success as a first-year principal. Current training topics include balancing tensions in organizations, developing a leadership mindset, and leading teams for results. Under TSL, we will also now provide mentors for AP participants. This mentor will be a current highly-effective principal who can offer targeted and focused opportunities outside the AP's current school. Academy Mentors will have a minimum of three years' successful experience as a principal (with at least one full year at their current school), be rated "Proficient" or higher on all standards of the NC School Executive evaluation rubric, and be rated "Effective" in student achievement based on their school's student growth data. They will receive a \$1,500 per mentee supplement for serving as a mentor, up to two mentees (\$3,000).

During *R3 Phase II* we will expand the program to include a cohort for high-performing principals, with a focus on principals with at least 3 years' prior experience as a principal.

Training in this cohort will focus on empowering individuals to navigate large-scale change (including supporting people through change), applying the process of rapid-cycle testing from improvement science to school improvement, and understanding and using different power sources to motivate individuals and change behavior. In even-numbered years we will offer a principal cohort of the program and in odd-numbered years we will offer an AP cohort of the program as a way to differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of highly effective school executives at either stage of their career.

***Goal 1c: Support a Grow-Your-Own Principal Program.*** PCS, in partnership with East Carolina University (ECU), recently established the Pirate Leadership Academy/Pitt County Schools Principal Fellows program to identify outstanding teacher leader candidates interested in pursuing a Master of School Administration (MSA) degree. Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, the district will employ two teacher leaders as assistant principals and pay the cost of tuition, fees, and books to pursue their MSA, and this number may change year-to-year based upon the current forecasting model. Upon graduation from ECU, these candidates commit to serve as a school leader in the district for a minimum of four years. In addition to receiving financial support for their MSA, these individuals will also get practical, hands-on experience by serving as an assistant principal throughout the entirety of their graduate studies. This program allows for immediate real-world application of their university learning, under the guidance of both an experienced and qualified school leader in the district and with the support of expert scholars from the university. Through the TSL program we are seeking to expand this program to identify up to 3 additional candidates from and for High-Need schools, with our current commitment demonstrated as a portion of our district match. Full details of the program are included in Appendix C.

***Goal 1d: Implement Focused Inquiry Teams (FITs).*** Currently, instructional personnel who do not have classroom-based teaching assignments (e.g., school counselors, media coordinators, etc.) and school executives are not eligible to participate in the district's CoP model. These school positions, however, are vital to the emotional and academic well-being of our students. In *Phase II*, we propose taking the lessons learned from CoPs and enable non-classroom instructional personnel to participate in a Focused Inquiry Team to address systemic challenges impacting student learning.

Educators who engage in structured, iterative cycles of collaborative inquiry around targeted challenges are more likely to both meet those challenges and grow professionally (Bryk et al., 2015; Donohoo, 2014; Wenger, 1988; Wenger, et al., 2002; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Specifically, having people most connected to a problem help research and address potential solutions is critical for buy-in and implementation fidelity (Barab & Squire, 2004; Honig, 2006). As far back as 1991, McLaughlin found that program success relies heavily on (a) the expertise of educators in the specific practices they need to apply, and (b) opportunities for them to collaborate with other program implementers as they try out the practices (see also Barab & Squire, 2004; Cohen-Vogel et al., 2015; Honig, 2006). Through the TSL grant, PCS will create 14 FITs for both non-classroom instructional personnel and school executives. Participants will receive an annual supplement of \$1,500, a figure aligned with the stipend paid to Collaborating Teachers when they serve as members of CoPs. Up to 10 FITs will be dedicated to non-classroom based instructional personnel such as school counselors or media coordinators, while the remainder will be dedicated to school executives.

Each FIT will meet regularly and conduct disciplined inquiry (Bryk et al., 2015) around their identified topic, working to address the identified challenge by researching, implementing,

and tracking the impact of specific strategies using an improvement science framework. Each FIT provide an opportunity for up to 4 for professionals from multiple schools to collaborate with their peers and focus on large-scale challenges, with a majority of the participants in any FIT coming from High-Need schools. For example, the district is currently faced with the challenge of supporting students who are returning to school buildings after 18 months of distance learning in virtual environments, which means some students in 1st grade may never have entered a school building because kindergarten was 100% virtual. One FIT might be composed of school counselors from several schools who identify social and emotional needs and implement interventions, measure impacts, and then plan adjustments to repeat the cycle. In short, these FITs provide highly effective non-classroom instructional personnel opportunities to research, collaborate, and innovate while positively influencing practices which improve student learning across the district.

FITs will work closely with the district's Office of Continuous Improvement and Program Effectiveness (OCIPE) and, in particular, the Director of Program Effectiveness. Further information regarding that office and the close relationship between FITs and the OCIPE is included in under Objective 4.

**Objective 2: Creating a Culture of Coaching Leaders.** Students in High-Need schools generally have more extreme and intense needs than do their peers from Non-High-Need schools. Unfortunately, data indicate that students at PCS's highest needs schools often are not served by the district's most effective teachers (Tables 3-4 and 7-8 in Appendix E). Both research and our successes from TIF highlight the importance of regular coaching to sustain long-term, deep change. The State of North Carolina uses a state-wide teacher and school leader rubric and evaluation process developed under Race to the Top, which represents a rigorous,

valid, reliable, and objective process for evaluation. The primary purpose of objective 2 is to support school executives to implement this process with fidelity and to include student achievement in rubric ratings in a fair way. Our focus here will be twofold: first, to implement a system of regular coaching for school executives around school leadership, and second, to increase the coaching skills of school executives so they can more effectively lead their teachers and staff.

One aspect of *R3 Phase I* was to recruit qualified teachers to High-Need schools, and our experience with TIF demonstrated it was more effective to grow the teachers already working in these schools than it was in trying to recruit new teachers. This experience forms the heart of *R3 Phase II* by focusing on developing the capacity and skill of our current school leaders through intensive training, coaching, and support. School executives play an important role in keeping “irreplaceable” teachers in a High-Need school by coaching them into becoming leaders themselves (The New Teacher Project, 2012); Harkavy, 2007).

***Goal 2a: Implement Regular Coaching for School Executives.*** To further expand the system of coaching support already in place for teacher leaders, a new School Executive Coach will be hired to implement a system of regular coaching and support for School Executives. By hiring a School Executive Coach, the district will be able to provide intense 1:1, targeted coaching for principals and assistant principals. This position, plus others responsible for coaching leaders, will be enrolled in a coaching-certification program to earn their International Coaching Federation (ICF) certification in an effort to best empower them to coach leaders. Principals and assistant principals in High-Need schools will benefit from scheduled, regular coaching conversations with either the School Executive Coach, district senior staff, or other district directors/coaches. These coaching sessions will occur at least monthly, and, depending



on the individual needs of the principal or assistant principal, may be scheduled as frequently as weekly. To provide focus for coaching conversations, participants will develop 90-day focused plans.

***Goal 2b: Increase the Coaching Skills of School Executives.*** On one hand, principals and assistant principals can benefit from coaching to deepen their overall leadership skills and capabilities, and on the other hand they also need to grow in their ability to coach others. In *R3 Phase II*, all school executives will complete a formal training program to equip and empower them with the skills and mindset required to coach those they lead. Training will include large group learning sessions, individual coaching sessions, and ongoing skill development practice embedded within regular principal meetings. The current *R3* program co-directors hold either trainer or practitioner certifications in Cognitive Coaching<sup>SM</sup> (Costa & Garmston, 2016), *Becoming a Coaching Leader* (Harkavy, 2007), the Leadership Circle Profile (Anderson & Adams, 2016), EQi 2.0, DiSC, and Polarity Management (Johnson, 2014; Kise, 2014), and have trained and coached literally hundreds of school leaders and coaches across the district and state.

### **Objective 3: Align Professional Learning, Job Expectations, and Performance**

**Evaluation.** Where our first two objectives were focused on developing people for specific roles in the district, this third objective is designed to integrate our HCMS districtwide to create a learning ecosystem for adults (Drago-Severson, 2009; Hirsh et al., 2014; Kegan & Lahey, 2016, King & Newmann, 2001, Senge, 1990, 2012) who then create the learning ecosystem for students. This is accomplished through a districtwide professional learning plan, ensuring consistency for district instructional leadership and support positions (Hirsh et al., 2014).

### ***Goal 3a: Implement a Comprehensive, Districtwide Professional Learning Framework.***

We will begin this work by developing and implementing a comprehensive, system-wide

professional learning framework. This will empower the district to fully integrate the Professional Learning programs by aligning them to national professional learning standards (Learning Forward et al., 2011). The school system has a clear instructional framework for student instruction, including identified learning objectives and an instructional delivery framework, but we do not have a comparable framework for adult learning. Without a clear outline and list of expectations for professional learning, different programs within the district can appear to be competing against each other rather than collaborating to support all educators; this strategy will align this work. Under TIF we created learning tracks for advanced teaching roles, so under TSL we will create new learning tracks for others, including educators new to the system, beginning teachers, experienced teachers, new coaches, new school executives, school lead mentors, etc.

Researchers have demonstrated that one of the best ways to improve student learning is to focus on the learning of their teachers (Breidenstein et al., 2012; Costa et al., 2013; Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson et al., 2013; Dufour, 1997; Guskey, 2002; Joyce & Showers, 2002; King & Newmann, 2001; O’Day & Smith, 2016). PCS is committed to developing a common instructional framework for professional learning, including common instructional delivery expectations; identified learning objectives aligned to learning competencies; expectations for coaching and practice; a robust professional learning evaluation method; and an internal micro-credentialing system (Hirsh et al., 2014; Learning Forward et al., 2011). A unified vision for professional learning is needed by school coaches and district trainers to deliver consistent support across the LEA. Where teachers are the instructors in a classroom for students, our school coaches and district trainers are the instructors in the classroom for adults. They design and deliver professional learning experiences, provide 1:1 support to

teachers who need it, and give feedback to teachers. Designing a system-wide framework for adult learning forms the foundation upon which the district supports all professional educators to perform at the highest, most effective levels.

As highlighted in the TIF program evaluations, one of the strengths of the *R3 Framework* has been the professional learning and coaching provided to participating teachers. Internal surveys and evaluations of trainings reveal that professional learning delivery is a strength of Pitt County Schools (Measurement Inc., 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b). Creating a system-wide framework for professional learning represents an opportunity for these expert trainers from across schools and departments to collaborate and continually improve their own craft.

Important aspects of creating this aligned framework will include gathering the input of stakeholders across the district, creating a set of expectations for all trainings, developing tracks for trainers to become internally certified in key trainings, creating internal certifications/micro-credentials for trainers and teachers, and developing a plan for ongoing evaluation of professional learning. While much of this work will be done in-house, we will hire a professional learning consultant to facilitate the process and serve as a third-party expert. The consultant will be required to spend significant time in the district conducting focus groups, identifying key trends, and providing expertise in these areas, particularly around measuring the impact of professional learning on student achievement. As with other consultants we hire, we will issue an RFP and use a competitive bid process. Ideally, we will work with a consultant who can support multiple aspects of the TSL grant (including program evaluation, rubric development and professional learning system development).

***Goal 3b: Develop a Learning Pathway for Staff New to the District and Existing Staff in New Positions.*** A key aspect of creating a systemwide professional learning framework will

be the identification of specific learning tracks for all educators. This includes basic onboarding as well as specialized tracks leading to district-recognized micro-credentialing. For teachers to be eligible for various career pathway positions, they are required to hold advanced certifications in various areas depending on their desired role. Currently, the two most common credentials are NBPTS certification or holding a master's degree. By developing internal micro-credentials, we will greatly expand the candidate pool for teacher leader positions and be able to create professional learning experiences aligned to the long-term goals of the district. These trainings will be aligned to teachers', teacher leaders', mentors', and school executives' job expectations and evaluation rubrics. Clear performance expectations will allow educators to participate in targeted, on-time training designed to help them demonstrate growth on their job-specific evaluation instrument, aligned to their individual career goals. It will also allow individuals to forecast and plan for desired future career positions and begin preparing for advancement by participating in relevant and aligned training.

***Goal 3c: Provide Financial, Mentoring, and Coaching Assistance and Support to Teachers at High-Need Schools Pursuing Advanced National Teacher Certification.*** Research demonstrates that teachers certified by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards consistently produce higher results in student learning than their non-certified peers. For this reason, the State of North Carolina provides two days of release time every year for NBPTS candidates to focus on their portfolios, and rewards NBPTS teachers with an annual 12% pay increase. Internal PCS data show the overall percentage of NBPTS teachers at Non-High-Need schools is four-times that of High-Need schools (Table 8, Appendix E). In an effort to close this gap and increase the availability of NBPTS teachers to students in our High-Need schools, PCS will provide additional support to NBPTS candidates from High-Need schools. Many teachers

struggle to identify the financial resources to pay for the fees associated with NBPTS, so PCS is committed to providing funding for teachers currently serving at a High-Need school to obtain NBPTS certification. Teachers who participate in NBPTS have up to three years to complete all four components, and they can attempt any number of components in a given year. Funding will be provided to up to 60 teachers from High-Need schools to enroll in the certification process. Beyond fees for the exam, all candidates will be assigned a NBPTS mentor to provide individualized coaching, guidance, and feedback as described earlier in our Mentoring Pathway.

**Objective 4: Create an Office of Continuous Improvement Program Effectiveness.**

All too often, many schools and districts either make quick decisions based on incomplete data or suffer from data-paralysis and never make any changes; these extremes prevent them from making nuanced and difficult decisions which can exponentially move a school or system forward. The overall goal and purpose of creating an Office of Continuous Improvement and Program Effectiveness (OCIPE) is to enable the district to conduct its own internal research in an effort to gather and report promising evidence on what works in our schools and district at large, allowing for replication and adoption across the system. Creation of OCIPE will support the district in examining issues objectively, identifying gaps and trends, and charting new paths forward for improvement - whether that path is continuation, elimination, or adaptation. In full, the model proposed here will build our local capacity to use evidence to adopt interventions and practices with proven records of success, and to implement them through improvement communities that use rapid-cycle testing to spread successful interventions across the network. This Office will build the capacity of PCS to sustain successful programs which demonstrate clear positive impact on student and adult learning while eliminating those which do not.

The OCIPE will allow us to build and sustain capacity within the district to test out, implement and scale effective strategies and instructional programs across the district. Under our plan, we will (1) partner with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) to establish and develop a new Office of Continuous Improvement and Program Effectiveness and enroll fifteen school and district leaders in UNC-CH's new certificate in Improvement Science to build our local evaluation and continuous improvement capacities; (2) adopt rapid-cycle testing and other tools from improvement science to quickly assess whether a change is an improvement; and (3) network our FITs together to form Networked Improvement Communities to speed our collective learning.

**Goal 4a: Partner with a Tier I Research University.** Creating this new office and working with a UNC-CH as a Tier I Research University draws on research showing that leadership is a key driver of improvement and organizational performance (e.g., Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Goldring, et. al, 2009; Heck & Hallinger, 2009). The office will be led by a Director of Continuous Improvement and supported by a Program Effectiveness Specialist. The skill set required to evaluate program effectiveness, interpret data, and establish next steps is one that requires a person with a history in program design, implementation, and evaluation; this person needs a deep understanding of the ways school systems work and an equally deep skill set in data collection and analysis. Upon receipt of the TSL grant, the district will immediately advertise for a Director of Continuous Improvement and a Program Effectiveness Specialist. These two individuals will be mentored by UNC-CH staff to develop their own capacity to effectively support the district in this effort beyond the TSL grant, as well as be two of the individuals enrolled in the School of Education's certificate program in

Improvement Science, with an additional 13 enrollments to be identified at a later date. Full details regarding the work UNC conduct with PCS is included in Appendix C.

Recognizing the presence of politics inherent in any system, this office will report to Superintendent, so as to avoid any potential conflicts with other departments, especially when examining programs those departments lead. Over the course of the three-year grant we expect to conduct rapid-cycle testing in areas such as ways to create clear and fair measures to evaluate teachers based in part on measures of student achievement, particularly in non-tested areas; the impact of our instructional coach program on student achievement; Title I best practices; the impact of school remediation/intervention dollars on closing learning gaps; school equity analyses/audits; and the effectiveness of our beginning teacher support program in preparing new teachers to meet the needs of diverse students, among others. On some of these more sensitive issues, our university partners will take the lead in authoring the final reports.

**Goal 4b: Implement the Tools of Improvement Science.** The first tool of improvement science, rapid-cycle testing, refers to Plan–Do–Study–Act, or PDSA, cycles. The PDSA cycle is shorthand for testing a change (e.g., new program) in the real work setting—by planning the test, doing the test, observing the results, and acting on what is learned (Bryk et al., 2015; Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 2014; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016). The first PDSA cycle represents a very small-scale test of change (for ex., in one or two classrooms). By starting small, risks associated with early failure are limited while technical knowledge, confidence, and buy-in are built among front-line implementers (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). Through the repeated use of these cycles, implementers learn from each test, refine the change so that it works within the context in which it is being implemented, and test it again with a somewhat larger number of implementers until, ultimately, the process results in system change (e.g., Cohen-

Vogel, et al., 2015; Cohen-Vogel, Cannata, Rutledge, & Socol, 2016). Other tools from improvement science include, but are not limited to, assessments of organizational readiness for change, root-cause analyses, and driver diagrams (Langley et al., 2009; Liker & Meier, 2006). The tools are drawn from a family of improvement approaches from business and healthcare that work to merge the power of research with a strong basis for causal inference (by starting with an evidence-based practice) with systems thinking and iterative testing to improve organizational decision-making and optimize outcomes (Berwick, 1989; Bheuyan & Baghel, 2005; Cohen-Vogel, 2019).

**Goal 4c: Create Networked Improvement Teams.** The work of OCIPE will be organized around the logic that student outcomes are improved by *combining* evidence-based practice with the development of human capacity for implementation at scale. By evidence-based practice, we mean interventions and practices supported by strong or moderate evidence, as defined by the What Works Clearinghouse. By implementation at scale, we mean deep, consequential change that is sustained over time and spread throughout a system; building capacity for implementation at scale relies on the tools of continuous improvement, including root cause analyses and plan-do-study-act cycles (Cohen-Vogel et al., 2015). The logic reflects a growing concern that knowing what works in education is critical, but not enough, for boosting student outcomes. As important as adopting practices supported with sound scientific evidence is developing the necessary know-how for those practices to spread effectively (Bryk et al., 2015; Fishman et al., 2013; Park et al., 2013). NICs are highly structured, intentionally formed collaboratives that aim to address a high-leverage problem of practice and help organize the work of improvement (Cohen-Vogel et al., 2018; Dolle, Gomez, Russell & Bryk, 2013; Russell et al., 2017). When implementers come together in NICs, teams benefit from an expanded



colleagueship of expertise and the experience of others as they try out and test new practices (Peurach & Glazer, 2011); in short, NICs fuel knowledge accumulation and dissemination (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011). Networking our FITs from across the district empowers them to expand their impact across the entire district (Figure 2). Returning to our example from earlier regarding students coming back to school after 18 months of distance learning, the district could have multiple

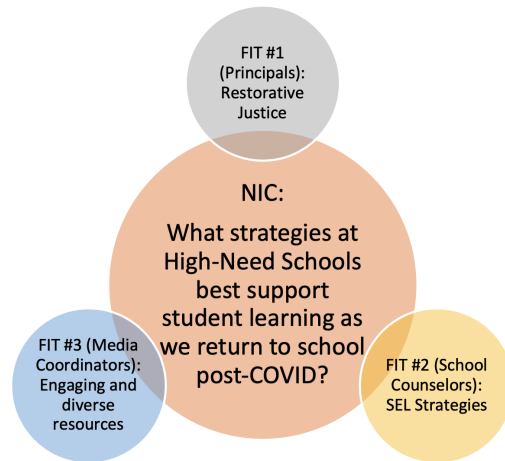


Figure 2: How FITs work together in a NIC to address a district challenge

FITs exploring the challenge. In addition to the school counselors already mentioned, media coordinators could also examine how books and materials for diverse learners impacts the students’ motivation to engage in classroom learning while school executives examine ways to establish grade and schoolwide procedures to reduce the likelihood that students of color are disproportionately suspended or sent out of class for misbehavior. Our plan, therefore, includes how FITs collaborate across the district in a Networked Improvement Community (NIC). Because FIT membership will be composed of a majority of participants from High-Need schools, this means the majority of participants in NICs will also be from High-Need schools

**Objective 5: Align & Focus District and School Efforts on Equity.** Pitt County

Schools is no different than most other districts in the state and country in that we have identified inequities at both the student and teacher level, and over the past several years, individual schools and departments within PCS have implemented a variety of strategies in an effort to achieve a more equitable system. We have learned, however, that absent a districtwide vision and focus, these strategies, well-intended as they are, can compete or conflict with each other. In

January 2021 the district hired two Co-Directors of Equity and Excellence to both align and focus the district on equity issues at the systems level, and in the spring of 2021 the district released an updated strategic plan with multiple objectives focused on equity. Providing equitable access and opportunities does not necessarily mean we will achieve equitable outcomes; achieving more equitable systems requires a focus on both. Therefore, PCS has a refined focus on identifying and reducing inequities in the district. From providing training to teachers to better meet the needs of diverse learners, to implementing specific strategies to recruit, support, and retain a more diverse teaching force, to creating specific new pathways and opportunities for minority teachers, PCS is committed to ensuring equity for students and staff. Initiatives which have already begun are included in our district leverage amount, including the Equity Co-Director positions, and we are proposing to use TSL funding to supplement and expand on the work the district is already doing.

***Goal 5a: Create and Support District Equity Leadership Teams.*** During the summer of 2021 the district established a team of 14 diverse leaders from across the district, including teachers, principals, classified staff, and district leaders, plus the equity co-directors and senior staff, to form an Equity Advisory Council (EAC). This team is responsible for identifying current inequities and examining those inequities for potential contributing factors. The team will then plan strategies to address the inequities and advise, support, and guide implementation. We will also create school-level equity teams to work alongside the district EAC to support and guide the work in every school in the district.

This team is responsible for setting the vision and aligning the work across the district. They will also work to identify inequities and strategize ways to address them. During the fall of 2021 the team will provide training to principals, assistant principals, and district leaders based

on areas such as implicit/unconscious bias and leading culturally responsive teaching. Over a two-year period, beginning during the summer of 2022, we will establish School Equity Teams, and each team will be led by an Equity Partner (EP). These EPs will be school personnel who earn an annual stipend of \$2,500.00 to lead the School Equity Team. Candidates will be screened at the district level and then interviewed at the school level before being offered the leadership position.

***Goal 5b: Understanding, Respecting, and Adjusting to Human Uniqueness.*** A core tenet of work centered around equity is that every individual is unique and valuable, deserving of respect - and sometimes that requires us to adjust our own approaches to better work together. This process begins with both understanding ourselves and others. As we grow in shared knowledge, we can develop mutual respect and adjust our behaviors as needed. Training will be provided to staff to deepen their knowledge around ***content*** of issues such as culturally-relevant teaching and cultural proficiency. We can't improve or address what we don't know or understand.

***Goal 5c: Equip and Empower Staff and Students for Behavior-Changing Conversations.*** Working toward more equitable systems absolutely requires training on the content surrounding cultural proficiency and culturally responsive teaching, but that in-and-of-itself is insufficient; large-scale behavioral change also requires training around the ***process*** whereby we engage with each other through individual and group conversations. Our TIF work has uniquely placed and prepared Pitt County Schools to navigate these tensions well, as much of our training has developed skills in leaders such as collaborating, communicating, and listening, while simultaneously developing mindsets and values around transparency, vulnerability, and humility - all of which are necessary to move forward. During *R3 Phase II* we will expand these

process-oriented trainings to more staff while simultaneously offering new learning opportunities around relevant content related to identified inequities in the district.

***Goal 5d: Increase the Number of Educators of Color.*** Pitt County Schools, as part of our TSL grant, will implement several strategies to better recruit and retain teachers of color. We will create a PCS Educator Fellows program focused on recruiting minority and Hispanic students. This program is designed to identify high school students who demonstrate promise as future teachers and provide ongoing scholarships upon enrollment in a post-secondary education program in exchange for a commitment to serve in PCS upon college graduation. Participating students will receive a \$5,000 annual scholarship for use toward their teaching degree, in exchange for a commitment to teach at least four years in a PCS classroom upon graduation. Finally, we will develop partnerships with area HBCUs to recruit graduates of their schools of education by both attending and hosting job fairs for minority teachers.

Recruiting teachers of color into the district is just the first step, and once they are here we will support them through multiple strategies so as to retain them. Beginning teachers will be assigned mentors; teachers without degrees in education will receive a minimum of 80 hours of professional learning **in their first year** to empower and equip them; and they will also be offered the opportunity to participate in affinity groups so they can connect with other individuals from similar backgrounds. These strategies are all in addition to the opportunities for advancement and growth afforded all teachers.

**(iii) The evaluation will assess progress towards achieving intended outcomes.**

The school district currently contracts with a highly qualified evaluator for both our TIF NC Teacher Compensation Model grant programs, and that evaluator was identified in 2016 through a competitive bid process which received eight different responses to our RFP. Options

were initially narrowed down by a team of reviewers who read and scored each proposal based on established and communicated criteria. The top three firms were invited for in-person presentations/interviews, and from those three finalists the team chose Measurement, Inc. based on their experience and demonstrated excellence in working with prior TIF grantees across the nation. Given their intimate knowledge of the district, our current program, and the length of our relationship, our intention is to extend their current contract to include program evaluation services for the TSL grant. In compliance with federal guidelines, we are certifying that “any employee, officer, or agent participating in the selection, award, or administration of a [this] contract is free of any real or apparent conflict of interest,” including organizational conflicts of interest.

Our evaluator will conduct both formative process evaluations and a final summative outcome evaluation. The process evaluation will focus on how the project is being implemented, how the project is operating, the services it delivers, and the functions it performs, and documenting the decisions made in carrying out the project. It will address whether the project is being implemented as originally designed and is providing services as intended. This will be an ongoing activity, occurring throughout the period of project operations, and will be a vehicle for periodically organizing and providing feedback information to key personnel, school administrators, and the *R3* management team. Feedback provided by the evaluator will be used to refine the project and help PCS pursue continuous improvement and achieve project objectives. The annual summative reports will be presented to the Board of Education at one of their public meetings, and all reports will be posted to the school district’s website.

Some of the research questions to be addressed in the process evaluation will be:

- To what extent have goals and objectives set out in the program design been met? What explanations are available for any variances from stated goals and objectives, and do these explanations offer useful feedback to program managers?
- How faithfully has the program been implemented?
- What changes have occurred in schools, both in student and faculty/staff populations since the program began? What are some factors which impacted the success or lack of program success at schools?
- What program areas appear to work smoothly, or contribute strongly to the program's goals?

The outcome evaluation will measure the overall impact of the program on factors such as student learning, teacher effectiveness, and school leader effectiveness. In addition to the GRPA measures required by the grant, it will examine and explain effects produced by the project on student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and the effectiveness of instructional support provided to teachers by mentors, school executives and district leaders. Some specific questions we will ask our evaluator to explore as part of our outcome evaluation include:

- To what extent have mentors and school executives impacted student achievement of individual teachers, the entire school, and/or the district as a whole?
- How does the impact compare between High-Need and Non-High-Need schools?
- What aspects of the program does the evidence suggest should be sustained?
- How might the program be replicated in other districts, particularly in eastern NC?

### **(C) Quality of the Management Plan**

Pitt County Schools (PCS) is the applicant and fiscal agent responsible for execution and oversight of this project. Pitt County Schools has been the prior recipient of multiple federal

grants and has the capacity and experience to oversee the proposed project. Currently, PCS manages a \$16.2m TIF grant and a \$4.2m State of North Carolina Teacher Compensation Model (TCM) grant. In 2009, the district received a \$9m School Improvement Grant (SIG) to turn around three low-performing schools, and between 2009 and 2014, PCS collaborated with ECU on an \$8m Teacher Quality Partnership grant. The school district annually receives numerous other grants from public, private, and governmental sources. The PCS Finance Department ensures, supports, and monitors the financial resources of the school system and individual schools, assuring that Generally Accepted Accounting Procedures (GAAPs) are followed as required by state and federal law. The district engages in a comprehensive annual financial audit that encompasses all the funds and account groups within the school system. The audit is performed after the close of each fiscal year by a certified public accountant or by an accountant certified by the Local Government Commission as qualified to audit local government accounts.

The *R3 Framework* is managed by the district's *Department of Excellence, Equity, and Leadership* (DEEL), which is a cross-departmental collaboration between the Human Resources, Curriculum & Instruction, and Professional Learning departments. The goal of the management plan is to achieve full integration and collaboration between the various departments in the school district, creating a singular system of support for leaders and teachers. The department is currently staffed by nine individuals including the Director of Professional Learning and Leadership Development, the Director of Educator Support and Leadership Development, two Co-Directors of Equity, four Career Pathway Specialists, and an Office and Payroll Manager. The first two individuals provide oversight and leadership for the department as a whole and the second two (Co-Directors of Equity, Excellence, and Leadership) are responsible to lead and coordinate the district's work around developing an equitable system. In addition, the three

Career Pathway Specialists provide direct training and support to teachers leaders in the system including those in our advanced teaching roles. The district is fully committed to sustaining these additional positions post-grant, pending that the program produces the desired results.

The project will have three co-directors. Dr. Thomas Feller, Jr., Director of Professional Learning and Leadership Development, will serve as the primary liaison with USED for purposes of communication and reporting. Dr. Seth Brown, the Director of Educator Support & Leadership Development, and the Director of Continuous Improvement (DCI, still to be hired) will serve as the additional two co-directors of the project. Resumes for Dr. Feller and Dr. Brown are included in Appendix B. As both these individuals are already employed by the district, their positions will not be paid with grant funds. Accomplishing the goals identified in this proposal will require the employment of few additional staff members, in addition to the already identified DCI. We intend to hire a Program Effectiveness Specialist to work alongside the DCI in OCIFE, as well as a School Executive Coach. Finally, due to the increased number of mentors who will serve in schools via the new pathways, we will hire two additional Career Pathway Specialists to serve in the DEEL office. Finally, given the complexity of tracking and managing the grant funds and our local/state matching funds, we will hire a Finance Analyst who will report to the Project Director and also serve as an Administrative Assistant to the three co-directors.

The vast majority of grant funds in the program provide compensation and rewards to school executives, mentors, and increasing capacity of individuals in the district through training and development based on expanded job responsibilities and demonstrated impact on student learning. Accomplishing the goals identified will take more than the individuals named above, though additional personnel will be paid for as part of our district match.



Specifically, the two Co-Directors of Equity, four existing Career Pathway Specialists, and the current DEEL Office Manager will be paid using non-grant funds (full details in our budget narrative, and job descriptions for new positions are included in Appendix F). This demonstrates the district's commitment to the program both in the immediate future and ability to sustain the program post-grant.

In an effort to fully integrate the *R3 Framework* with every aspect of the district's HCMS, we currently have an *R3 Leadership Team* and an *R3 Principal Advisory Council (PAC)*. The leadership team consists of the district superintendent and assistant superintendents, the district CFO, *R3* program co-directors, and teacher and principal representatives. This leadership team will continue to provide oversight, direction, and final decision-making authority for much of the TSL project. Each of these two teams (the leadership team and PAC) meet regularly every-other-month in alternating months, with special meetings called as needed. Each of the program co-directors meet at least twice a month with their respective supervisors, in addition to bi-weekly meetings between the program co-directors themselves.

#### **(D) Adequacy of Resources**

##### **(i) The likelihood that the project will result in system change or improvement.**

Since implementing the *R3 Framework* in 2013-14, Pitt County Schools has tracked its positive impact on numerous indicators including teacher turnover, job satisfaction, and student performance. Few school districts in the State of North Carolina have a Human Capital Management System (HCMS) or Performance Based Compensation System (PBCS) comparable to the *R3 Framework*, which is serving as a model for other districts across the state; in fact, the work of PCS has been highlighted and examined closely by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and NC State Board of Education, and we have worked with several other

districts in the state to train and support them in replicating key R3 elements in their districts. Data collected over the last four years show that the objectives of the *R3 Framework* have been met in PCS and led to student achievement increases and increased the capacity of teacher leaders (Measurement Inc., 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b). Building upon this success, *R3 Phase II* will significantly enhance our ability to develop the capacity of teachers and school executives in High-Need schools and increase student achievement.

Because we are expanding our HCMS in *R3 Phase II*, we are able to apply structures and strategies from *Phase I* to accelerate the process. For example, key stakeholder groups, like the *R3 Leadership Team* and the *Principal Advisory Council*, are currently identified, and both have a clear vision for what a successful CoP looks like, so creating FITs should require less explanation and trial-and-error. Given the smoothness of *Phase I* roll-out, something our program evaluator specifically mentioned in the evaluation reports (Measurement Inc., 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b), there is also a significant level of trust and respect among school district personnel for the *R3* program leaders.

**Theory of Change.** Ultimately, this project is about improving the instructional capacity of classroom teachers in High-Need schools to increase student achievement. Killian (2008) defined a theory of change as identifying “the chain of causal actions that will lead to the intended results. It is a strategic picture of how the program actions will produce results” (p.46). At the heart of our theory of change is success - success for students, teachers, and the system at large. We agree with Maxwell’s (1997) supposition that everything rises and falls on leadership. As school executives, teacher leaders, and mentors become more effective, they are better able to help teachers become more effective, resulting in increases in student achievement. As we focus on school executives and mentors, they then guide the change process in their own teachers; as

teachers improve their instruction, student achievement will rise, thereby increasing teacher and leader efficacy.

Personal and collective efficacy is the internal belief and conviction that educators can have a significant impact on student achievement **and have the knowledge, skills, and capabilities to do so**. Researchers have recently identified collective efficacy as a key component to improving student learning (Donohoo, 2014, Hattie, 2012). Impacting change in efficacy is a difficult process. PCS follows Guskey's (2002) argument that the most effective way to change efficacy is to begin at the point of professional learning and create opportunities for individuals to engage in new experiences resulting in new results. For these reasons, *Phase II*, funded through TSL, allows our school leaders and other educators to engage in deep inquiry to and rapid-cycle strategy experimentation in an effort to experience new results; it is why we will work to align professional learning, job expectations, and personnel evaluation to engage teachers; and it is why we will develop the capacity of our school leaders and teachers to engage in reflective practice as guided by coaches and mentors. In short, as teachers improve their skills and abilities in the classroom as a result of professional learning, student achievement increases. As student achievement increases, teachers become more confident and believe that they can have a greater impact on student achievement (i.e., increased efficacy), which then motivates them to further improve their skills and abilities in the classroom, thereby increasing student achievement, and the cycle continues.

**Our Logic Model.** Just as Killian (2007) defined the term "theory of change," she also defined the term "logic model." The logic model includes the theory of change and "outlines the program resources or inputs and the actions or strategies program designers plan to use to

produce the results (theory of change), and the outputs each action produces” (p.46). Our logic model is based on a combination of theory, research and practice (Appendix A).

**(ii) The likelihood that the project will build local capacity to address needs.**

*3 Phase II* targets school leaders and mentors who contribute to the growth and development of classroom teachers. This project will create a comprehensive system of training and support to develop highly effective educators with the dispositions and commitment to become “leaders who build leaders” across the district; *R3 Phase II* is built on the foundation of developing the internal capacity of teachers. Our logic model illustrates our belief that when we invest resources in developing instructional leaders who support and grow teachers, then both individual and collective teacher capacity will grow, resulting in improved student outcomes.

**(iii) Sustainability of the project, commitment of partners, and stakeholder support.**

PCS has a strong history of sustaining effective programs that result in improved student learning even after grant funds have been expended. For example, we created both the Teacher Leadership Institute and the Key BT programs using seed money from foundation grants and now fully sustain those programs without the use of outside funds, impacting the lives of nearly 150 teachers annually with training and supplements. Under our School Improvement Grant, we funded high school graduation coaches at select schools; as we observed evidence of the positive impact they were having, we eventually made local appropriations for every high school to employ a graduation coach. Similarly, under TIF we implemented advanced teaching roles in the form of Career Pathways. We are sustaining all those roles using non-TIF funds. Now, in *Phase II*, we will diminish TSL funding requests in Year 3 for certain line-items in the budget to prepare to sustain the project post-grant. This gradual shift is highlighted in our budget narrative. Additionally, we are also investing early in the program items such as trainer certifications and

the development of internal capacity so that the costs of sustaining the program post-grant are actually less. For example, a primary focus of our OCIPE is to build capacity for the district to identify what is working and what is not working so that we can target our investments in high-impact strategies. OCIPE, in this regard, will support the district in becoming more efficient, so that we can ultimately increase student learning and teacher support by efficiently targeting resources to where they are most needed. Finally, by partnering with UNC-CH, ECU, and other external partners to develop our own personnel, we will develop the internal capacity to complete future work without having to contract outside vendors. This is similar to the strategy we used in *Phase I* to certify internal trainers for key district trainings. By working with partners to certify internal trainers, we no longer have to contract outside vendors to offer the critical trainings to our staff, which saves us money over the long-run and allows for long-term sustainability.

In our budget narrative we will describe in detail how we will provide both match funding and leverage funding; we define leverage funding as federal funds expended toward the grant objectives but which we cannot count as an official match. Our match funding includes salaries and benefits for program personnel, additional assistant principals at High-Need schools above our state allotment, and program costs for our teacher leader development programs and our principal and educator fellow programs. Additionally, we are leveraging an almost equal amount of federal dollars towards program goals and objectives such as advanced teaching roles and additional program personnel. Overall, the project will be supported by a combination of the TSL grant, district match, and leveraged funds. Table 9 (Appendix E) shows these percentages, computed both with and without the leveraged federal funds. As is illustrated in the table, the percentage of our annual district match increases to the highest point in year 3 and is well within

required limits. The district is fully able to meet all required matches and is committed to sustaining the program post-grant; a letter of assurance of match and commitment for sustainment is included in Append D.

The full *R3 Framework* was developed with extensive input from multiple stakeholders including teachers, principals, instructional coaches, central office personnel, university partners, business partners, and the Pitt County Board of Education between August 2014 and January 2015 in response to NC Session Law 2014-100, Section 8.41. As documented in TIF grant Annual Performance Reports (APRs), implementation of the *R3 Phase I* has positively impacted the target population and created measurable change. *R3 Phase II* is simply a continuation of the original work those early partners collaboratively designed, with the addition of our *R3 Leadership Team*, principal advisory council, district equity advisory council, district senior staff, and experts from both UNC-CH and ECU; all aspects of this proposal have been touched by the educators it will directly impact. Several of the specific strategies, such as the FITs model and the mentoring program for new school executives, are explicit requests from school executives and others in the district, and several strategies in response to Competitive Preference Priorities 1 and 2 are a direct result of the work of the district equity council. In addition to the support of the PCS Board of Education, who voted unanimously to support and submit the proposal at their August 2, 2021 regular board meeting, the program has broad support among district leaders, principals, the local education foundation, the State Superintendent for Public Instruction, and our university partners (Appendix C). Full implementation of *R3 Phase II* will provide PCS educators with the strategies and opportunities they requested and helped to develop.

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