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## A. Significance

### (1) *The national significance of the proposed project*

There is a new frontier in postsecondary preparedness that few traditional *or* charter school districts have begun to explore or research and that is **the importance of developing a college-going identity to a student’s choice of, matriculation to, and persistence in college.** IDEA Public Schools is a high-performing Texas-based charter management organization (CMO) that serves a student population that is **88.6% economically disadvantaged** (Appendix GA1 and definition of high-minority school). IDEA exists to close academic and economic gaps by preparing students from underserved communities for success in college and citizenship—is proposing an Early Phase EIR project (*IDEA C3: Culture, Character, College*) with the potential to make a significant contribution to this field of study.

Harvard Graduate School of Education researcher and author, Mandy Savitz-Romer, and her co-author, Suzanne Bouffard, have shone a national spotlight on what is missing in the support of first generation college-goers, and that is a developmental approach to college access and success. In their book, *Ready, Willing, and Able* (2012), the researchers focus on the developmental tasks and competencies that young people need to develop in order to plan for and succeed in higher education. These include articulating aspirations and expectations, forming and maintaining strong peer and adult relationships, motivation and goal-setting, and self-regulatory skills, such as planning—in short, **helping students develop a college-going identity—in addition to the crucial support for developing their academic skills and their college knowledge.** To help students be successful in college and persist through to graduation, schools must build *all three*: increase academic rigor and student achievement; teach students and parents about college, how to apply, and what to expect; and support students in developing their own unique identity so they can see and experience themselves as a successful student in

their best-fit college or university. It is this last piece that IDEA believes is missing in its efforts to send high-need, low-income, first generation students to and through college. IDEA seeks to develop *IDEA C3* in an effort to inform other districts and CMOs across the country as they improve the rates of college success and completion for their graduates as well. IDEA believes lack of a college-going identity is not just an LEA or a CMO gap. It is a national challenge and a gap in the education sector itself that IDEA intends to bridge with EIR support.

**Nationally, nearly half of all students fail to graduate from college with a Bachelor’s degree in 6 years (by age 24); 77% of students in the top income quartile do so, but only 9% of students (1 in 11) from the lowest income quartile do so<sup>1</sup>.** Of IDEA’s 29,334 students, 88.6% are low-income, 95.2% are ethnic minorities, and 34.9% are English-language learners—groups significantly underrepresented in postsecondary education. **Yet 51% of IDEA’s graduates earn a college degree within 6 years of high school graduation. But there is still a large variance in college completion as compared to their affluent peers. IDEA’s long-term goal is 85%.**

IDEA achieves this remarkable level of success through a core set of **research-based academic programs and supports** that ensure its students are more academically prepared for college than their peers and through the efforts of a **dedicated college counseling program** that is a best-in-class operation. “AP for All” sees all IDEA secondary students take 11 Advanced Placement courses (which are proven to increase students’ college GPAs as well as their four-year college graduation rate—Hargrove and Dodd, 2007) during their high school career. In 2016, 25% of IDEA’s students became AP Scholars (the College Board’s designation for students earning

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<sup>1</sup> “Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States.” Pell Institute, 2016. See also Appendix GA2.

scores of 3 or higher on at least 3 AP exams)—well on the way to its goal of 35%. Additionally, IDEA’s drive to have 100% of its students take the ACT exam (currently: 87% of IDEA students vs. the national avg. of 59%<sup>2</sup>) is further evidence of its dedication to College for All. These approaches (strong academic rigor plus a focused college counseling program) have seen **100% of IDEA’s graduates accepted to college every year for the past 11 years**—2/3 of whom will be the first in their families to earn a college degree. Not only does this fundamentally change the trajectory of lives for students and their families, it also changes the ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity profiles of the colleges to which IDEA sends its many graduates, increasing the rates of academic success and degree completion for low-income minority students nationwide. **Furthermore, IDEA’s college matriculation rate is 99.9% over the past 10 years**—11% of whom have enrolled in selective Tier I and Tier II colleges in 2017<sup>3</sup> (up from 9% in 2015).

Despite these successes, IDEA understands that excellent results in academic achievement, college acceptance, and college matriculation are not enough to close the achievement gap between high-poverty, high-minority students and their more affluent peers. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, **only 30.4% of low-income students have graduated or are on track to graduate from college**. In the regions where IDEA operates, these figures are substantially lower—15% of students in Texas’s Rio Grande Valley, 9% in Austin, and only 6%

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<sup>2</sup> “The Condition of College & Career Readiness”. National report of the ACT. More than 1.92M students in the Class of 2015 took the ACT. Nearly 1.7M took the SAT.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Barron’s Most Competitive, Highly Competitive and Very Competitive (+) rankings. <http://barronseduc.com/1438006896.html>. See also Appendix GB3 for a list of Tier I and Tier II colleges and IDEA college partnerships.

in San Antonio<sup>4</sup>. For students graduating from IDEA, however, this figure is **60.6%**. Yet IDEA is acutely aware that—in the words of its college-enrolled graduates interviewed by IDEA’s research partner, Copia Consulting—preparing students to *go* to college is not the same as preparing students *for* college.

By the time all schools in its 2022 growth plan reach full enrollment, IDEA will be half the size of the Houston Independent School District (the largest district in Texas with 215,000 students and the 7<sup>th</sup>-largest in the U.S.), yet IDEA will produce more college graduates than that district by a factor of 1.5-2x. (Appendix GA4). However, to achieve its long-term goal of 85% **college completion** in six years, IDEA (like all other K-12 systems across the nation) must **prepare their high-need students to persist through college and earn a college degree.**

The following table shows IDEA’s progress against its **EIR project-period goals** (see all metrics, page 11) for college persistence, success, and degree attainment (persistence until sophomore year in college being the best indicator for college completion overall—see Appendix GA5 for IDEA’s current persistence rates):

| IDEA’S COLLEGE PERSISTENCE METRICS <sup>1</sup>                    | CURRENT | GOAL |
|--|---------|------|
| % of Freshmen Alumni Will Remain Continuously Enrolled (Full-time) | 66%     | 85%  |
| % of Sophomores Will Remain Continuously Enrolled (Full-time)      | 37%     | 75%  |
| % of Freshmen Will Return in the Spring Semester                   | 90%     | 95%  |
| % of Alumni Graduating in 4 Years                                  | 22%     | 45%  |
| % of Alumni Graduating in 6 Years                                  | 51%     | 65%  |
| % of Alumni Will Be Enrolled in or Graduated from College          | 66%     | 90%  |

For this EIR project and other postsecondary preparedness improvement initiatives, IDEA has partnered with Education First—a national, mission-driven strategy and policy organization—which has conducted a deep-dive diagnostic on IDEA’s efforts to support students *to and through* college. The findings are applicable to all high-performing LEAs as well as to those who strive to improve as they work to increase the college preparedness of their low-

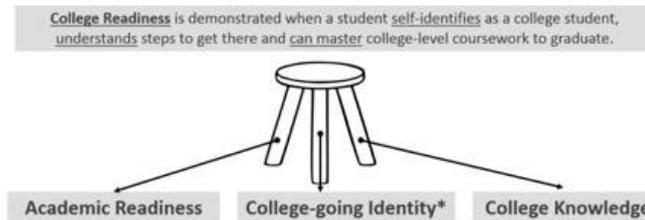
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.texastribune.org/education/public-education/8th-grade-cohorts/region/edinburg/>

income and first-generation college attenders.

With the research of Savitz-Romer and Boffard as the standard, the diagnostic revealed that IDEA is focusing disproportionately more attention on **academic readiness and college**

**knowledge than on college-going**

**identity**—three key components of college readiness (see graphic).



The disproportion is common throughout most K-12 systems across the country. Academic departments teach and reinforce the academic knowledge and skills necessary for college success. College counselors guide students through the technical steps needed to research, apply and matriculate to college. Unfortunately, educators are not traditionally trained on the cultivation of student identity and beliefs. However, ***all three components are necessary*** to ensure students persist through to college graduation, and ***all three are typically present in affluent students' (e.g. Dallas' Highland park neighborhood) backgrounds and educational environments***—the comparison group IDEA uses to measure its success in closing achievement gaps. These students form their college-going identities, in part, through interactions with parents and older siblings who have college degrees in households where succeeding in college is assumed. High-need first generation college students do not have the benefit of this level of constant reinforcement and support. Therefore, it is up to highly trained school staff to help low-income students develop their college-going identities *in addition to* maintaining an unrelenting focus on improving academics and increasing college knowledge.

The cultivation of college-going identity is less about defining institutional college goals for students (i.e., 100% of students will enroll in college) or perfecting the formula for an ideal college applicant (i.e., 4.0 GPA, 100 hours of community service, and student leadership

experience) and more about the actual psychology behind a student developing personal goals, understanding how college plays a part in those goals and viewing themselves as belonging in a college environment. This latter nuance is where IDEA must now increase its focus, and the results will be widely shared with other LEAs interested in increasing college readiness.

***(2) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies***

The following table shows IDEA’s **existing strategies** (see Appendix B for related research) to address each of the three previously outlined components of college readiness:

|   |
|---|
| <b>Academic Readiness</b>   |
| Direct Instruction (DI) for PK-5 • Critical Student Intervention supports accelerate learning for those struggling in reading and math • Response to Intervention (RtI) for students needing Special Education services • Individualized learning using adaptive software meets students where they are and builds mastery at the pace that is right for them • AVID “Road to and through College” (RTTC) • AP for All (11 AP courses for all high school students) • ACT test preparation • 100% ACT participation • Academic Counselors provide social counseling and oversee standardize test execution so are attuned to the link between students social needs and academic challenges • Parents have access to student achievement reports from adaptive software programs that also prompt parents to engage with their child about their learning • Report card nights require parents and students to confer with teachers to review grades and progress   |
| <b>College Knowledge</b>  |
| College-focused culture begins in PK as classes are giving college names, college banners decorate halls and classrooms as reminders of college knowledge and to increase students’ exposure • College Success Team (CST) includes a Senior Director of College Success and two Directors of College Success, who ensures program excellence and consistency across all IDEA regions, full scale Campus Counseling Teams are composed of a Director of College Counseling and two College Counselors, who lead IDEA’s Road To and Through College (RTTC) curriculum in order to ensure students are prepared to go to the best college for them • Parallel RTTC material for parents to build college knowledge in families and ensure they are invested in and supportive of their child’s college-bound path • Partnerships with local and national colleges and universities (see attached MOUs) • 5-7 college visits per student by grade 12 help students become savvy consumers of postsecondary education who can discern the differences between schools of various sizes, geographic locations, educational foci, and regional cultures • Speaker events • College and career investigations/inventories • College-based summer enrichment programs and courses • Quarterly workshops for parents of 6-8 graders • monthly workshops for parents of 9-12 graders • All students complete FAFSA • College Nights • Financial aid workshops for families • Individual student and family college application, understanding financial aid, making a final decision and matriculation next steps assistance |
| <b>College-Going Identity</b>   |
| College match and fit workshops • Pre-College Institutes target the college-identity development of seniors <sup>2</sup> • Research-based surveys of IDEA graduates in their first year of college to gather alumni’s attitudes about college academics, social life, and finances <sup>3</sup>   |

IDEA is currently concentrating its efforts in the first two areas and needs assistance building the third. Education First also found that IDEA’s current approach to developing non-academic factors “appears confined to one-off programs or initiatives and not integrated more intentionally throughout a student’s school experience,” further evidence of the need for an approach specifically directed at building students’ college-going identity. **For this EIR initiative, IDEA will test the hypothesis that increasing students’ social and emotional skills, developing their character, and increasing their knowledge, skills, attitude, and beliefs will help build and strengthen their college-going identities, which will, in turn, increase their rates of college completion.** To this end, IDEA will use EIR funds to: **1) Create a customized curriculum** to help high-need, low-income, and/or first-generation students in grades 6-12 develop a college-going identity; **2) Create, pilot, iterate on, and improve a research-based rubric** (see draft, Appendix GA7) to measure the development of a student’s college-going identity over time; **3) Provide professional development for educators** (College Success Team and counselors) in the importance and use of the curriculum and the rubric; and **4) Evaluate the impact of these three interventions** on college enrollment and matriculation. As is further explained in Section C, IDEA will test the impact of schools implementing the curriculum and rubric as compared to its control schools, which will maintain the status quo.

***(3) The extent to which the proposed project represents an exceptional approach to the priority or priorities established for the competition***

IDEA’s exceptional approach to serving high-needs students (AP 1) and increasing their postsecondary preparedness (AP 4) has four key ingredients: **1) A new and innovative field of study.** Before 2003, this important component of postsecondary preparedness was neglected in the literature, and since then, many studies have lumped “developing a college-going identity” in with “increasing college knowledge” rather than distinguish it as key lever on its own. As a

result, it has not been on the radar of education innovators long enough to have produced measurable results linked to increased rates of college matriculation, persistence, and graduation. To IDEA’s knowledge, **a curriculum and rubric that builds and evaluates the development of a college-going identity among high-need, low-income, majority-minority student population does not currently exist, and its development would not only represent an exceptional approach but would also be a ground-breaking contribution to research in the field of postsecondary preparedness** and in the ability of schools to diagnose gaps, provide interventions, and improve the rates of students’ college persistence, success, and completion. In short, the field is new and ripe for research and innovation. **2) Partnerships with leaders in college preparedness.** In addition to continuing to partner with Education First, IDEA will work with InsideTrack—the only college dropout prevention initiative to meet WWC evidence standards without reservations (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/72030>, also see Appendix B and GA8 for moderate evidence citation and other research-backed strategies proposed). InsideTrack will help IDEA combine professional coaching, technology, and data analytics to increase students’ college enrollment and completion rates and career readiness. As the primary partner for coaching and helping adults have effective conversations to build students’ college-going identity, InsideTrack will provide training and consulting, model best practices in coaching for students, and help IDEA build its capacity to continue the program through improved management of counselors and the application of technology. **3) A history of successfully developing cutting-edge systems, tools, and initiatives.** In 2010, in partnership with Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, IDEA used a \$5M Investing in Innovation (i3) grant and \$2M in privately raised matching funds to innovate and improve many key human capital tools and programs, creating systems to build their own high-quality teachers and school leaders.

The New Teacher Institute<sup>5</sup>, New Leader Institute, and Teacher Leader Foundations programs that resulted from the i3 initiative underwent several iterations and started an organizational transformation. IDEA also led teams of curriculum managers, coaches, and teachers through a ten-year process to create and continuously refine its Guideposts for Excellent Teaching (GET) and School Leadership Levers (SLL) rubrics, which are used system wide to measure (respectively) teachers' and school leaders' effectiveness through a combination of observed behaviors, progress toward individual goals, and demonstrated improvements in student achievement. This history of institutional innovation proves IDEA has the dedication, expertise, and focus to manage large, multi-year federal funding projects and to create and deploy exceptional solutions that raise standards for staff and improve achievement for students. 4) **A long-range plan for success.** The long-term impact of this undertaking will not be fully measureable or realized until the students taking part in this intervention have matriculated to, persisted in, and graduated from college—four to six years *after* graduating from IDEA Public Schools. Therefore, IDEA has designed this Early Phase EIR project with a view ahead to a possible Mid-phase project that will allow continuous improvement on this innovation as well as provide a rigorous longitudinal evaluation of the program's impact as well as its cost-effectiveness. The ongoing feedback cycles of Early and Mid-phase research and innovation, combined with the deployment of this innovative project across an expanding network of

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<sup>5</sup> **A study of the New Teacher Institute is currently under review for inclusion in the WWC database.** Findings are that there was no statistical difference in the performance of new teachers going through this program and veteran teachers—in effect, closing gaps in tenure.

schools<sup>6</sup> will allow each year's participants to benefit from lessons learned over a longer timeframe. This powerful combination is expected to yield important data on postsecondary preparedness that will be nationally applicable as other districts and CMOs work to close achievement gaps across racial and economic classes.

These four elements comprise IDEA's **exceptional approach** to researching solutions for the high-need, majority low-income, majority Hispanic, high ELL, at-risk population IDEA serves, which provides the ideal test-bed for a project of this scope and importance. This is the student population growing the fastest both in Texas and across the U.S. where, according to the U.S. Census and the Pew Research Center, Hispanics accounted for more than half (54%) of the total U.S. population growth from 2000-2014. Therefore, an EIR research study that focuses on this population will make an important contribution to others serving similar students.

## **B. Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan**

### ***(1) Project goals, objectives, and outcomes are clearly specified and measurable***

IDEA maintains three org-wide goals and creates objective measures for every project that relate back to supporting these three. Related five-year EIR objectives<sup>7</sup> are as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> IDEA will grow from 51 schools in 2016-17 to 143 schools by the end of the funding period.

<sup>7</sup> Tier I and Tier II schools (metrics under Goal 2)

**GOAL 1: ACHIEVE COLLEGE-READY STUDENT RESULTS**  
*Strategies: Replicate proven academic model; continuously gather and analyze quantitative data; provide individualized instruction and supports; provide Road to College course and ACT test preparation; all high school students take 11 AP courses; provide robust "to and through" college counseling and preparation activities; create PK-12 curriculum to build social and emotional skills and a research-based rubric to assess development of students' college-going identity.*

| Objective Performance Measure   | Baseline                    | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|---|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| % passing   % commended on state exam/end of course (all tested grades)                       | 83   22                     | 83   22 | 84   24 | 86   26 | 88   28 | 90   30 |
| Average ACT score   | 20                          | 20.25   | 20.5    | 20.75   | 21      | 21.25   |
| % of graduates named AP scholars (3 scores of 3+)   | 20                          | 27      | 29      | 31      | 33      | 35      |
| % of student who will rank in top quartile for college-going identity using evaluation rubric | TBD<br>After rubric created | TBD     | TBD     | TBD     | TBD     | TBD     |
| % of graduates who are accepted to a college or univ.   | 100                         | 100     | 100     | 100     | 100     | 100     |
| % of graduates who are accepted to a Tier I or Tier II college or university                  | 40                          | 45      | 50      | 50      | 50      | 50      |
| % of graduates who matriculate to a college or univ.  | 99                          | 99      | 99      | 99      | 99      | 99      |
| % of graduates who matriculate to a Tier I or Tier II college or university                   | 12                          | 15      | 18      | 20      | 23      | 25      |

**GOAL 2: BUILD A STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION**  
*Strategies: Ensure postsecondary preparedness increases (see Goal 1) and improved supports for soft skill development of students; measure and monitor staff satisfaction; focus on attendance to drive academic results so students are in the classroom*

| Objective Performance Measure        | Baseline | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|--------------------------------------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| % Employee Retention                 | 80       | 80      | 80      | 80      | 80      | 80      |
| % Average Daily Attendance           | 97.5     | 97.5    | 97.5    | 97.5    | 97.5    | 97.5    |
| % Student Persistence (all students) | 90       | 90      | 90      | 90      | 90      | 90      |

**Will report annually on the federal cost/student served by the grant.**

**GOAL 3: ACHIEVE THE MISSION AT SCALE**  
*Strategies: Replicate successes from research-driven best practices; use evaluation findings to iterate and improve students' preparation for success in college and citizenship.*

| Objective Performance Measure   | Baseline | 2017-18 | 2018-19  | 2019-20  | 2020-21   | 2021-22   |
|---|----------|---------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Students impacted by EIR grant   % high-need as defined by FRL qualification (EIR performance measures) | NA       | NA      | 2,590 80 | 5,576 80 | 12,124 80 | 13,780 80 |
| % of students graduating college in 4   6 years   | 17   31  | 25   35 | 27   37  | 29   39  | 31   41   | 33   43   |

In preparation for project implementation, the EIR project design team has drafted a preliminary Project Management Plan (Appendix GB1) that will guide project planning and implementation. This plan will be expanded upon notice of funding and will be updated by the Project Director.

***(2) Management plan will achieve project objectives on time and within budget and includes clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones***

IDEA intends to become the largest producer of low-income college graduates in Texas and beyond. In support of this effort, IDEA’s HQ-based College Success Team (CST) as well as campus-based Directors of College Counseling and College Counselors (resumes and org chart, Appendix C; Appendix GB2 for Scorecards by which each is evaluated), work individually with

students throughout their time at IDEA. IDEA’s College Counseling program, which supports the work of the **academic team**, is designed to prepare high school students for the college application process (building their **college knowledge**) through a focus on students’ best college match and fit. According to the American Enterprise Institute, Hispanic students are especially likely to be “under matched,” or to enroll at a college that is less selective than they are qualified to attend. Given the relationship between selectivity and graduation rates, under matched Hispanic students are more likely to leave college without completing their degrees than if they had attended more selective schools.<sup>8</sup> At IDEA, college counselors ensure every student applies to and is accepted by an IHE that is a just-right match for his/her career objectives and personal financial situation and will afford the best chance of graduating in 4 years.

The CST will work together for the ultimate success of this EIR project designed to help students develop a **college-going identity**. Key personnel include: **Phillip Garza, Chief College and Diversity Officer**, sets the vision and strategy IDEA’s work to send its diverse student body to and through college while consciously growing a diverse organization reflective of the communities IDEA serves. He is accountable for ensuring IDEA achieves metrics related to college acceptance, matriculation, and persistence in support of achieving Goal 1 (page 11). He is also responsible for the performance of the CST and will indirectly oversee the **IDEA C3** Project Director as he is ultimately responsible for achieving all EIR grant outcomes.

**Cheryl Clark, Senior Director of College Success**, is accountable for the strategy and follow-through of all college readiness and matriculation initiatives through the support and development of school-based Directors of College Counseling and College Counselors. For the Class of 2017 (reset annually and aligned with EIR Goal 1), she is evaluated on goals including

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.aei.org/files/2010/03/18/Rising-to-the-Challenge.pdf>

100% college matriculation, 50% acceptance and 25% matriculation to Tier 1 and Tier II colleges, oversees the strategies for senior events (College Fair, College Signing Day, Senior Brunch, etc.), leads the work of the RTTC curriculum (grades 6-12) across the district, and oversees the school DCC and CC teams. Cheryl will provide leadership and implementation guidance for *IDEA C3* by serving as the manager of the **Project Director** (PD) to be hired with grant funds. This close management will ensure that the findings of the EIR grant are reflected and adopted in IDEA's overall approach to college counseling across the organization.

The PD will: **1)** Work closely with grant curriculum partners, school leaders, and campus-based college counseling team; **2)** Serve as liaison to the third-party evaluator to ensure integration and alignment of *IDEA C3* program activities with the schools' academic programs, including core and enrichment curricula, to ensure the seamless integration of character development programming; **3)** Oversee professional development training execution and access for educators with fidelity to overall implementation; and **4)** Convene quarterly meetings of project partners, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders in order to solicit feedback and perspective on project operations that will facilitate overall project implementation and course correction. IDEA's Data and Analysis team will work with CST to provide data to make real-time decisions and inform the progress of the grant vision. In addition, Copia Consulting (evaluator) will be highly involved in the process to share their formative findings to help the IDEA team iterate on the program and evaluation rubric; and **5)** Hold onboarding and routine check-in meetings with project-related staff; **6)** Meet bi-weekly with IDEA's district-level grant management team; **7)** Participate in quarterly goal-setting and reflection to ensure achievement of project objectives; **8)** Conduct regular check-ins with the IDEA business office to ensure project objectives are achieved on time and within budget; **9)** Prepare for and participate in grant-related audit

activities; **10)** Actively manage the project budget; **11)** Participate in annual 360-degree grant reflections (year-in-review meetings); and **12)** Participate in CST annual “Step-backs” (meetings designed to improve grant management, program coordination, and implementation).

Other personnel key to the successful implementation of *IDEA C3* include: **Elizabeth (Lisa) Cavazos**, IDEA’s bilingual **Director of Student Advocacy, Parent and Community Engagement**, who joined the team in this new role in 2013 where she has focused on building a framework for social and emotional support to include a partnership with Communities in Schools, introduced emotional intelligence development, and manages efforts to improve student persistence across the organization (Goal 2).

**Sari Wilson, Senior Director of Alumni Affairs**, sets the vision and direction for post-secondary support for IDEA graduates as they persist, re-enroll, and graduate from college (Goal 3). In addition, she created the Collegiate Summer Away Program (CSAP), which sends 60% of IDEA’s juniors to summer resident programs on college campuses. This program incubates the entire application and matriculation process a year prior to senior year, giving students practice with the process. Sari attended the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s College-going Identity and Student Success Program and recently graduated with a Master of Education from that institution. She will provide key insights and direction in the development of the college-going identity curriculum, rubric, and related trainings.

**Tarah Burris, Director of College Partnerships**, manages, develops and formalizes relationships that expand the student support continuum across the country. Each partnership is uniquely designed for the specific university and supports students’ needs in four ways: **1)** University-provided campus support; **2)** Student and parent visioning for college (What does it take to get to and through college and what does it mean to the student, parent, and family to

achieve this? What will college life look like at their chosen school?); **3)** Financial assistance; and **4)** Data sharing to inform gaps in student success, used to enhance the partnership support of students. For *IDEA C3*, Tarah will ensure the data-sharing will be appropriately leveraged to help in the assessment of the college-going identity rubric.

**School Leadership Teams.** At each IDEA campus, the **School Leadership Team** consists of the Principal, Assistant Principal of Instruction, Assistant Principal of Operations, Director of College Counseling (DCC), and Academic Counselor. As the pilot evolves to the level of scalability, the DCC or CC will report **weekly** to their manager (Principal/DCC) and **monthly** to the PD. The DCC and Principal will keep *IDEA C3* goals and objectives foremost in mind when evaluating the counseling team and monitoring fidelity of program implementation.

**School-based College Success Teams.** Each College Prep campus (grades 6-12) has a DCC and two CCs (approximately one counselor for every 33 students), ensuring that students receive the kind of personalized attention they need to be successful in their college applications. The CCs teach college entry level skills, with a focus on time management and organizational skills, as well as preparation to take the ACT exam. CCs also help students and their families understand how to pay for college, including how to apply for financial aid, as well as how to prepare for the first day of college and how to overcome typical challenges they will experience. **This team’s remarkable efforts helped the 507 members of the Class of 2016 garner 2,741 acceptances to two and four-year colleges and universities, including 375 Tier I and Tier II acceptances, and earn a collective \$27,279,023 in financial aid.**

DCCs and CCs will be accountable for implementing the college-going identity curriculum and will help the PD and CST train other educators. This will include norming on how to use the rubric to assess students’ growth in college-going identity over the life of the grant and the

importance of success in these measures as predictors of college preparation. The DCC and CCs will support the PD to submit data the Project Evaluator needs for the study, conduct surveys as requested for project evaluation, and fulfill other tasks as requested by the PD. Campus-specific feedback from DCCs and CCs on all aspects of the project will contribute to continuous improvement of the 6-12 curriculum, training and rubric.

Unique to IDEA and its grant management model is the **GrantEd Team**, whose purpose is to ensure fidelity of program implementation across all grants, across all schools. GrantEd is a team of 11 grant managers who meet biweekly with the Grants Director and Business Office and monthly with other federal and state grant managers to share best practices and learn from one another’s projects and efforts. Professional development topics are derived from group’s need and include ethics in decision-making, strategic budget planning, and navigating partnerships. This group was showcased as a model for effective grants management multiple times at U. S. Department of Education conferences. The *IDEA C3* Project Director will maintain membership on the GrantEd Team for grant management-related professional development.

Please see Appendix C for bios of all members of IDEA’s Executive Leadership Team (Chiefs) and their respective areas of accountability for the organization. Please also see the results of the survey of Executive Directors, Principals, and Counselors indicating 99% are in support of the project’s vision and the EIR application (in lieu of individual staff letters, Appendix D). *IDEA C3* will impact an increasing number of schools as follows:

| IDEA Region           | Year 2                    | Year 3                    | Year 4                      | Year 5                      |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| # Schools Impacted    | 4 Treatment,<br>4 Control | 8 Treatment,<br>8 Control | 22 Treatment,<br>23 Control | 22 Treatment,<br>23 Control |
| # Students Impacted   | 5,499                     | 11,590                    | 24,996                      | 27,980                      |
| # Counselors Impacted | 30                        | 62                        | 120                         | 134                         |

The **major milestones** of *IDEA C3* (detail on measures, activities, timelines, and personnel responsible provided in Appendix GB1) are summarized by year as follows: **Year 1 (2017-18):**

Build on IDEA’s foundational work with Education First and work with InsideTrack to research and create a customized 6-12 grade college-going identity curriculum, training and a research-based rubric to evaluate identity development in students; establish continuous improvement systems for data collection and protocols to implement feedback. **Year 2 (2018-19):** Pilot college-going identity curriculum, rubric, and related staff trainings according to table above; leverage pilot schools’ stakeholder input (school leaders, college counselors, teachers, students, parents) to iterate and improve on the program; begin qualitative evaluation work (focus groups, interviews, etc.) for years 2-3 and formative assessments to enhance program. **Year 3 (2019-20):** Roll out revised version of curriculum, rubric, and trainings with expanded EIR cohort; conduct an interim outcomes analysis and prepare for scaled rollout; construct treatment and comparison groups that will be monitored in years 4 and 5. **Year 4 (2020-21):** Implement the program with an expanded cohort; measure college-going identity using new rubric with all students in participating schools in grades 7 and 11; measure academic outcomes via Renaissance STAR, ACT, and AP exam results; assess students’ strengths, supports, and noncognitive factors via the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP); begin disseminating information on project formulation, structures, implementation, and early results. **Year 5 (2021-22):** Continue *IDEA C3* study with full cohort; track upward trends in the number 12<sup>th</sup> graders’ acceptances and matriculation to Tier I and Tier II colleges; conduct summative evaluation; disseminate information on entire project’s structure, results, lessons learned, and national applicability; prepare for an EIR Mid-phase application.

### ***(3) Performance feedback and continuous improvement***

IDEA uses Dr. John Kotter’s 8-step process for leading change<sup>9</sup>, which the *IDEA C3* Project

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.kotterinternational.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/>

Director will use as the protocol to implement and improve this grant-funded work. The 8 steps are: **1)** Establish a sense of urgency based on needs assessment and stakeholder buy-in (demonstrated through letters of support and survey responses, Appendix D); **2)** Form a powerful guiding coalition (the *IDEA C3* team and the CST); **3)** Create a vision (completed; will continue to be revised based on feedback from rounds of project iteration); **4)** Communicate the vision (to be done in year 1 and throughout the grant so this sight is not lost); **5)** Empower others to action the vision; **6)** Plan for and create short-term wins (achieved through the Project Management Plan’s milestones); **7)** Consolidate improvement and production (iterative development in years 3-5); and **8)** Institutionalize new approaches (wide roll-out of the project in three IDEA regions).

At the district level, IDEA’s Executive Team—composed of the CEO/Co-founder, Superintendent/Co-founder, Chief Administrative Officer, Chief Advancement Officer, Chief College and Diversity Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Human Assets Officer, Chief Program Officer, and Chief Operating Officer—meets weekly to systematically assess IDEA’s needs, set rigorous goals organizational goals (see table, page 11), and measure progress with a focus on improving student achievement and success in college. All employees have individual goals for their scope of work that “roll up to” and support achievement of IDEA’s organizational goals and metrics. Information is tracked to make real-time, data-driven decisions, identifying best practices or informing areas to course-correct. The weekly Executive Team meetings ensure oversight of this EIR project for the organization, alignment of the project to org-wide goals, and that the EIR project tasks are embedded into the existing daily operation and data monitoring activities of IDEA Public Schools. In addition, the **EIR Project Management Team (PMT)**, composed of the Project Director, the Chief College and Diversity Officer, at least three members of the College Success Team, at least two teachers, and at least one school leader, will

observe the following schedule of communication, coordination, and reporting: **Daily:** Project Director (PD) oversees all EIR activities and communicates with CST; **Weekly:** CST meets to communicate project implementation updates, assess progress toward goals, identifies what's working well, and address project implementation challenges and problem solves to address the challenge; **Monthly:** PD conducts site visits to participating schools in years 1 and 2 to observe the early stages of project development and implementation and to seek out and support best practices; PD checks in with project partners to ensure progress according to the Project Management Plan and with Copia, the EIR Project Evaluator, to ensure data collection and analysis is on track; **Quarterly:** Chief College and Diversity Officer reports EIR progress to IDEA Board; CST gathers in 2 day sessions to reflect on progress towards goals and strategize plans moving forward; PD will utilize this time to get feedback on iterative plan in years 1-3 and report on finding in years 4 and 5. **3 x/Year:** All staff participate in IDEA's three-phase Staff Development Cycle (goal-setting, mid-year two way manager and direct report feedback session, and end-of-year annual performance review); project-related staff will use this cycle to improve their personal practice while also reflecting on professional progress in achieving project goals and objectives; **Semi-annually:** IDEA conducts organizational health surveys (Appendix GB3) to gather feedback on staff morale and needs of the workforce; PD gathers stakeholder input (district and school leaders, college counselors, teachers, students, parents) to inform program development; **Annually:** IDEA conducts parent and student surveys (results figure into teacher evaluation scores as well as inform district leaders); PD, as supported by Evaluator, submits reports to USDOE on progress toward goals and objectives and other information as required.

#### ***(4) Mechanisms for broad dissemination to support further development or replication***

IDEA participates in several **national and regional educational networks** (see Appendix GB4 for details) that educate and/or support a similar body of high-need students and will serve

as excellent channels for broad dissemination of project success, including: The Bill & Melinda Gates Lumicore cohort; Aspen and Pahara Education cohorts; United for College Success; the National Advisory Board of The Collective, Teach For America's Alumni of Color Association; the Building Excellent Schools Network; the Charter School Growth Fund; college and university partners, including Austin College, Beloit College, Colby College, Johns Hopkins University, St. Mary's University, and the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley; Education First; InsideTrack; Texas Boys & Girls Clubs; Communities in Schools San Antonio; Choose to Succeed; RGV Focus. In addition, IDEA is committed to sharing takeaways with traditional school districts and has established relationships in its regions with their leadership to leverage shared learning experiences.

IDEA will also disseminate information on project challenges and successes by hosting **site visits** and participating in and presenting at **conferences** hosted by the Texas Conference for School Administrators, National Association for College Admission Counseling, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Texas Charter School Association, Reach Higher Summit gathering education leaders and partners, South by Southwest Edu, and others. Finally, IDEA's **IDEA C3** Project Director will network with other PDs throughout the funding period.

## **C. Quality of Project Evaluation**

*(1) The methods of evaluation will produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that will meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations*

An independent evaluation of **IDEA C3** will be conducted by Copia Consulting, LLC and will include an impact analysis, implementation analysis, and exploratory analysis. The research questions that guide the confirmatory impact analysis are: What is the impact of **IDEA C3** on 7<sup>th</sup> grade academic achievement after two program years? What is the impact of **IDEA C3** on 11<sup>th</sup>

grade academic achievement after two program years? Impact Analysis Design The process for selecting students that will participate in the intervention precludes randomization, but the evaluation will still yield strong results that will lead IDEA to understand the extent to which the intervention should be replicated. The evaluation will use an individual-level quasi-experimental design (QED) matched treatment and comparison groups assessing the two-year impact of the **IDEA C3** intervention on students' academic outcomes to meet **What Works Clearinghouse standards with reservations**. To avoid selection bias, the study will employ matched treatment and control conditions and 1:1 propensity score matching (PSM) using nearest neighbor matches without replacement to match students on the following covariates: FRL eligibility, ELL status, race, gender, and average scaled score on grade 6 (for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade cohort) and grade 10 (for the 11<sup>th</sup> grade cohort) Renaissance Star scores and ACT scores, respectively. Recent empirical studies comparing the results of randomized control trials and QEDs using PSM found that when a pretest of the outcome is used as a matching criterion and the two groups do not diverge significantly on matching variables, PSM can substantially eliminate bias in estimating causal effects in quasi-experiments and replicate the findings of experimental designs (Bifulco, Cobb & Bell, 2009; Cook, Shadish, and Wong, 2008; Cook & Steiner, 2010; Cook, Steiner, & Pohl, 2009).

Analytic Models: The researchers will employ hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to account for clustering. The following equation summarizes the 2-level (students in schools) HLM framework.

$$Posttest_{ij} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{10} * pretest_{ij} + \beta_{20} * treatment_{ij} + \beta_{k*}k_{ij} + \dots + r_{ij} + u_j$$

Where postscripts ij represent students in schools;  $\beta$ 's are the parameters to be estimated; posttest and pretest represents scores on the Renaissance Star for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade cohort/ACT for 11<sup>th</sup> grade cohort; treatment represents the intervention indicator (1 if a treatment student, 0 if

comparison student);  $k$  represents a vector of covariates such as FRL, gender, race, etc.;  $r$ 's are independently and identically distributed (iid) residuals with a mean of 0, and  $u$ 's are school effects estimated as random effects that are iid with mean 0.  $\beta_{20}$  is the parameter of interest, and represents the treatment effect. A similar HLM model will be posited for the exploratory analysis, and it will include a logit-link function for a dichotomous dependent variable: matriculation to Tier 1 colleges and universities.

## ***(2) The evaluation will provide guidance about strategies for replication or testing in other settings***

Implementation Study: This mixed-methods evaluation will provide detailed information on the implementation and interim results of the proposed intervention in the first three years. The aim will be to make data-driven recommendations for refining the intervention, and identify significant mediating relationships between the intervention and the outcomes of interest.

Implementation Evaluation Framework: Copia will create a tool to assess the extent to which the program meets five key dimensions used to measure implementation fidelity (Dane & Schneider, 1998; Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Reyes et al., 2012). They are: 1. **adherence**—whether the components of the intervention are being delivered as designed; 2. **duration**—the number, length, or frequency of sessions implemented; 3. **quality of delivery**—the manner in which the implementer delivers the program using the techniques, processes, or methods prescribed 4. **participant responsiveness**—the extent to which participants are engaged by and involved in the activities and content of the program; 5. **program differentiation**—whether critical features that distinguish the program from the comparison condition are present or absent during implementation. The tool will be used to discern adequate thresholds for treatment levels for inclusion in the confirmatory analysis.

Implementation Evaluation Methods: Numerous data collection methods will be employed

during the first three years of the project to inform program decision-making (see Appendix GC1). Transcripts from interviews and focus groups will be coded according to a structure designed to provide comparative information among participating schools and identifying factors and themes contributing to any differences. Surveys will be analyzed using factor analyses and ANOVAs enabling analyses by subpopulation and identification of statistical differences among respondents. A correlational analysis will evaluate the outcomes of interest by subpopulation and other covariates to inform program improvements. The inclusion of two different high-needs regions (one urban and one rural) across two different key time periods in a students' development (transition to high school, e.g. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> and transition to college, e.g. 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>) provide a potentially high-yield dataset where the study will exploit multiple sources of variation, across students, grade-levels, schools, regions, and time.

Reporting: Copia and IDEA will meet monthly (or as needed) to discuss developments in the evaluation and emerging findings. Two formal reports will be produced each year for IDEA and key stakeholders that contain analyses and recommendations designed to create reflection and positive changes in the program and its implementation. The midyear memo will provide formative feedback at the school level from the observations, interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Additionally, the end-of-school-year memo will also provide an analysis of outcomes data including student achievement data. In year 5, a summative report will be communicated externally and submitted for inclusion in the What Works Clearinghouse.

***(3) The methods of evaluation will provide valid and reliable data on relevant outcomes***

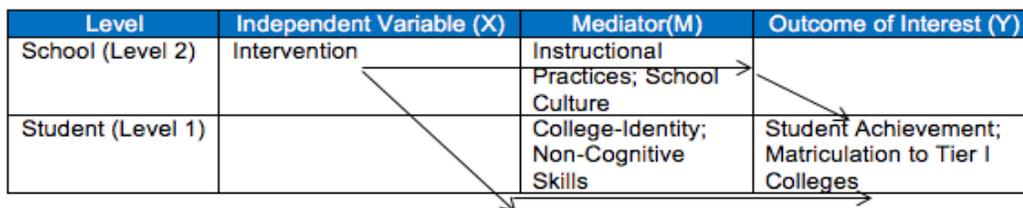
The confirmatory outcome measures for the impact analysis on academic achievement are based on valid and reliable tests that IDEA routinely conducts, making data collection and

management more efficient. Additional data will be collected from IDEA Public Schools’ data team including prior academic achievement results (6<sup>th</sup> grade achievement for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade cohort, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade achievement for the 11<sup>th</sup> grade cohort), and demographic data. These data will be used in the PSM matching for the QED study.

| Data Collection Methods for Impact and Exploratory Analyses |   |          |                                   |           |          |
|---|---|----------|-----------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Variable Type   | Indicators                                    | Cohort   | Data Source                       | Frequency | Existing |
| Outcome (Confirmatory)                                      | Academic Achievement                          | 7th      | Renaissance Star                  | BOY/EOY   | Yes      |
| Outcome (Confirmatory)                                      | Academic Achievement                          | 11th     | ACT                               | BOY/EOY   | Yes      |
| Outcome (Exploratory)                                       | Matriculation to Tier I Colleges/Universities | 11th     | Nat’l St. Clearinghouse/ Naviance |           | Yes      |
| Mediator  | Non-cognitive skills                          | 7th/11th | DAP                               | BOY/EOY   | No       |
| Mediator  | Teacher Instructional Practices               | 7th/11th | GET Rubric                        | BOY/EOY   | Yes      |
| Mediator  | College Identity                              | 7th/11th | College Identity Rubric           | BOY/EOY   | No       |
| Mediator  | School Climate                                | 7th/11th | Organizational Health Survey      | BOY/EOY   | Yes      |

**(4) Key components, mediators, and outcomes; measurable threshold for implementation**

Exploratory Analysis: The exploratory analysis will connect the implementation study with the impact study to do more than just inform whether or not the program is being implemented with fidelity or is achieving the intended outcomes; instead it will shed light on the “levers” that IDEA has to influence outcomes. Multi-level mediation analyses described in Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher (2009) will be applied to test how various mediating factors (M) like increases in non-cognitive skills or changes in instructional practices mediates the relationship between the intervention (X) and the outcomes of interest (Y), namely students’ academic achievement and college matriculation outcomes. The Table below describes the relationships that will be explored between the intervention (X), mediating factors (M), and outcomes of interest (Y).



A high-level summary of the evaluation plan is in the table below. At IDEA, there is high consistency in non-intervention curricula and program across all IDEA schools, and all schools contain similar percentages of high-needs, minority students. These facts coupled with the relatively high number of students receiving the intervention increases the likelihood of constructing valid, well-matched comparison groups.

| <b>Summary of Evaluation Plan Parameters by Study</b>   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
|   | <b>Study 1: 7th grade entry</b>  | <b>Study 2 : 11th grade entry</b>   |
| Intervention Components   | Character Curriculum and College Going Identity Coaching   |   |
| Cohort, Year, Grade at Entry  | 1 Cohort, Year 4, 7th grade  | 1 Cohort, Year 4, 11th grade  |
| Schools   | 22 treatment; 23 comparison  | 10 treatment; 10 comparison   |
| Sample Size (students)  | 4950   | 1700  |
| Treatment/ Comparison   | 2420 treatment; 2530 comparison  | 850 treatment; 850 comparison   |
| Confirmatory Outcome(s) and baseline pre-test (covariate)   | Academic Achievement: Ren-Star   | Academic Achievement: ACT   |
| PSM Matching Covariates   | <i>Baseline equivalence on outcome variable: Grade 6 Ren Star/Grade 10 ACT; Individual level covariates: FRL eligibility, ELL status, race, gender</i>                       |   |
| Statistical Analysis  | Confirmatory and Exploratory: Two level HLM (students nested within schools)   | Confirmatory: Two level HLM (students nested within schools); Exploratory: Two level HLM (logit link) |
| Exploratory Outcomes(s)   | EOC Exams (Math and Reading)   | Matriculation to Tier I Colleges  |
| Mediating Factors   | Non-Cognitive Skills as measured by DAP; School Culture as measured by Org Health survey; Instructional Practices as measured by GET; College Identity as measured by rubric |   |
| MDES (Confirmatory)   | 0.20   | 0.32  |
| **Each MDES assumes a Type I error of .05 at a power of 80%, and is calculated using the appropriate 2 level HLM model where assignment is at the school level. Please see the Appendix for other assumptions and details pertaining to the power analysis. |  |   |

Overall, findings from this study will be of promise/evidence for school leaders for developing interventions and support systems that better assist high needs students’ academic preparedness and college readiness (See Appendix B for Logic Model). Copia will also be charged with a cost-benefit analysis providing guidance aimed at ensuring the most impactful interventions are sustainable and replicable once grant funding has ended.