

**Equity Leadership in High Need Schools:  
Building High Quality Effective Instructional Leaders to Improve Student Outcomes**

**A. Quality of the Project Design .....2**

(1) *An Exceptional Approach to the Priorities .....2*

(2) *Professional Development with Sufficient Quality, Intensity, and Duration .....8*

(3) *Collaboration with Partners for Maximizing the Effectiveness .....15*

(4) *Services Provided with Focus on those with Greatest Needs .....16*

(5) *Project Appropriate to Address Target Population Needs .....21*

**B. Significance.....22**

(1) *Magnitude of Project Results on Needed Student Achievement Improvements .....22*

(2) *Reasonable Costs in Relation to Persons to be Served and to Anticipated Results .....23*

(3) *Potential for Project Incorporation at End of Federal Funding.....24*

(4) *Dissemination that Enables Others to Use the Strategies .....24*

**C. Quality of the Management Plan .....25**

(1) *Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes are Specified and Measurable.....25*

(2) *Management Plan to Achieve Objectives On Time & Within Budget .....26*

(3) *Procedures for Ensuring Feedback and Continuous Improvement in Project Operations .....29*

**D. Quality of the Project Evaluation .....30**

(1) *Methods of Evaluation to Produce Evidence of Effectiveness .....30*

(2) *Methods of Evaluation Provide Performance Feedback & Periodic Assessment of Progress toward Outcomes.....35*

(3) *Evaluation Methods Use of Objective Performance .....36*

(4) *Methods of Evaluation Provide Valid & Reliable Performance Data on Outcomes ....37*

**Absolute Priority 2(2).....39**

**Invitational Priority Support Micro-Credentials.....39**

**Conclusion .....40**

**Appendix A: Co-Director CVs & Key Personnel Qualifications**

**Appendix E: Figures & Tables**

**Appendix F: Power Analysis**

**Appendix G: References**

**Appendix H: Fidelity Self Assessment tool**

This application to Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) 84.423A is in response to Absolute Priority 2 (2)—Supporting Effective Principals or Other School Leaders with professional development activities that address literacy, numeracy, remedial, or other needs of LEAs and the students the agencies serve; and Invitational Priority—Support for the Use of Micro-Credentials.

The University of Kansas (KU) SWIFT Education Center (SWIFT) in partnership with the University of Oregon, Boise State University, University of Mississippi, and the University of Southern California will work with four high-need school districts to develop Principals through a promising practice herein referred to as the **Equity Leadership Series**. The project goals are:

Goal 1: Develop Equity Leaders who transform school cultures and improve student outcomes.

Goal 2: Create district capacity to sustain and develop future Equity Leaders.

Goal 3: Establish What Works Clearinghouse Moderate Evidence for the Equity Leadership Series.

Goal 4: Disseminate nationally the Equity Leadership Series with associated portable competency-based micro-credentialing.

What follows are the project design, management plan with detailed objectives, and evaluation plan with research questions that collectively will achieve the goals (**Appendix E**, Figure 1. Logic Model).

## **A. Quality of the Project Design**

### **(1) *An Exceptional Approach to the Priorities***

“...Learning is not solely an individual or cognitive phenomenon, but, takes place in a complex system of social, emotional and cultural arenas” (Kozleski & Choi, 2018, p. 35). Effective Principals utilize *instructional leadership* methods which influence how students experience classroom learning and *transformational leadership* which leverages the wider

organizational system to enable, stimulate, and support classroom learning conditions (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). When Principals develop their leadership with an understanding of the complete range of student variation, their leadership gives rise to equitable learning environments for students with all types of learning needs (Kozleski & Huber, 2012). Equitable learning environments support each and every student in a community and welcome them into a system of teaching and learning that is fluid, responsive, dynamic, alive, and uses all available resources to meet student needs (McCart, 2018). Equity Leaders enable the systems that result in improved academic student outcomes (Choi, Meisenheimer, McCart, & Sailor, 2017; Kozleski & Choi, 2018). Therefore, overall this project's approach is exceptional in the way in which it *develops instructional and transformational leaders whose schools become equitable teaching and learning environments that improve student outcomes.*

### **Exceptional Approach to Goal 1: Develop Equity Leaders**

Principals face great challenges when reshaping their school cultures to be equitable, to support teachers, and to improve student outcomes. They must ensure educators know they are valued and families are respected as they work to build a positive and welcoming school climate. They must become leaders who mediate learning through thoughtful discourse, high quality tools, and professional learning (Shogren, McCart, Lyon, & Sailor, 2015). They must establish a safe environment built through authentic positive feedback producing a professional network with high standards and time for exploration and learning new practices. They must enable teachers to design learning spaces in which students with multiple capacities can engage with the curriculum and make progress, even though what and how they perform may be very different from one another (Kozleski, Artiles, & Skrtic, 2014). These complex challenges are what led to the development of this approach of the Equity Leadership Series, authored by McCart,

McSheehan, Sailor, Mitchiner, and Quirk (2016). This professional development method is exceptional in that it advances Principal leadership competencies to *transform school culture and improve student outcomes*.

Choi et al. (2017) and Kozleski and Choi (2018) documented the promising evidence for McCart and colleagues professional development and technical assistance practice. They found the practice increased qualities of Administrative Leadership (see **Appendix E**, Figure 2, What Equity Leadership Looks Like), which, in turn, was positively related to implementation of equity-based multi-tiered system of support (MTSS; see **Appendix E**, Figure 3) (Sailor, McCart, & Choi, 2018) and, to a lesser degree, to three other practices for equitable learning environments (i.e., family and community engagement [Gross, Choi, & Francis, 2018], integrated educational supports and services [Kurth, Morningstar, Hick, & Templin, 2018], and policies and practices that remove barriers [Schuh, Knackstedt, Cornett, Choi, Pollitt, & Satter, 2018]). They found Administrative Leadership fostered by this promising practice was positively related to schoolwide academic outcomes as a school-level indicator that **significantly predicted** improvements in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math state assessment scores (see Significance for more on this promising evidence). This evidence is the basis for the project's Theory of Action:

***If**, Principals currently working in high need schools develop or enhance their leadership competencies through the Equity Leadership Series,*

***then** their leadership competencies will have a positive relationship to implementation of equity-based MTSS and other supporting practices that, when installed with fidelity, result in equitable educational environments and significantly improve school-wide English Language Arts and Math outcomes for all students both with and without disabilities.*

The Equity Leadership Series positions Principals to lead school-based teams to install and continuously improve evidence-based practices that meets the literacy, numeracy, and remedial needs of the students they serve, as indicated by the RFA. This project proposes an intentional focus on equity-based MTSS (Sailor, 2016) that will accelerate the effect of the professional development on student outcomes (see **Appendix E**, Figures 4. 5. and 6).

MTSS offers a culturally important framework that Principals can use to effectively address the needs of diverse student populations and the many competing educational initiatives. The National Board for Educational Administration’s Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 cites “creating an infrastructure to enable MTSS” as a core competency for initial Principal licensure (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017). Further, many state education agencies include MTSS initiatives in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) state plans and in special education State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) plans (e.g., [www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov); [www.fl DOE.org](http://www.fl DOE.org)). The current focus on MTSS emerged from the convergence of research on Response to Intervention (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2004), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (e.g., Horner & Sugai, 2015), and Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (e.g., Sailor, 2009), to name a few. This project affords Principals in high-need schools the tools to lead cultural and systemic transformation processes and implement equity-based MTSS to improve student outcomes, especially for those students who are historically underserved or segregated from the general education curriculum (see below subsection (4) *Services Provided with Focus on those with Greatest Needs*).

This Equity Leadership Series removes expectations put on Principals who are asked to serve as “Principal heroes” and turn around struggling schools in a year. Reality is an average school transformation process requires five to seven years to complete (Fullan, 2001). In fact,

Principals and staff in high need schools have previously attempted to improve student performance, and therefore **start from places of knowledge** upon which to build future improvements (McCart et al., 2016). This is one factor that drives the success of this series. The Principals and eventually school teams are brought to the table with a respect for the work they have done and the knowledge they bring to the table. Often Principal turnover is due to such pressures as school performance, accountability systems, and lack of high quality professional development (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018) and threaten this knowledge base and interrupt the improvement process. This project is designed to build up current Principals' leadership competencies through *simultaneous focus on their personal growth and development and that of the educators who they lead*. Principals will learn to support teachers through shifts in practice while shifting their own practices to create dynamic learning environments that facilitate navigation across the myriad of educator professional literacies and allow for merging of cultural and institutional belief patterns (Kozleski & Choi, 2018).

In response to the invitation priority of the RFA, the project will provide meaningful recognition of Principal learning through micro-credentials that are issued for competency-based artifacts generated through job-embedded activities (Acree, 2016) (see **Appendix E**, Figure 7 Digital Badges). Additionally, Principals will be able to demonstrate the schoolwide impact of equity leadership to families, communities and other stakeholders using data from valid and reliable fidelity assessments (see **Appendix H**, SWIFT-FIA).

### **Exceptional Approach to Goal 2: Create District Capacity**

This project addresses RFA Priority 2 by leveraging the power of systemic coherence (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). Project staff will meet regularly (quarterly) with district leaders to ensure *alignment between the Principal professional development goals and LEA priorities*, and one or more district leaders will “shadow” our team to *build capacity* to step into sustainable

professional developer roles as project resources fade. It is rare that Principal leadership development initiatives include a simultaneous focus on building district capacity to grow and develop such leaders beyond the initial training. To both build leaders while building district capacity to continually grow and support those leaders and future leaders, particularly rooted in highly effective practices such as MTSS, is what makes this project scope unique.

### **Exceptional Approach to Goal 3: Establish Evidence**

The project is structured to enable *efficacy studies to be conducted, while at the same time ensuring all Principals who participate in this project will receive the benefits of the Equity Leadership Series*. This approach is based on a group randomized control trial with a wait-list design, grouping schools in each district into matching pairs based on prognostic covariates and then randomly assigning schools in each district to one of four cohorts (Coalition for Evidence-based Policy, 2003) (see Evaluation section). By strengthening the evidence base that directly links Principal leadership competencies to improved outcomes for students with high needs, this project will have reach and impact well beyond the immediate participants.

### **Exceptional Approach to Goal 4: Disseminate Series & Micro-Credentials**

Currently, no Principal Leadership Series offers an MTSS framework that, when implemented with fidelity, results in improved student outcomes. This series offers that promise, and adds to it a system for micro-credentialing established and well-known Principal competences. The micro-credentials will be recognized nationally and portable both within districts and across states (see Significance, subsection 4).

In sum, our approach is an *exceptional* response to RFA priorities in that it offers: (a) an Equity Leadership Series for Principals that provides (b) coordinated, job-embedded professional learning with their school-based teams and (c) accompanying capacity building support for district leaders aligned to school and district priorities and systems. Further, this approach

includes high quality (d) portable micro-credentials to demonstrate personal competencies; (e) school-based self-assessment data on MTSS implementation to demonstrate applied leadership; (f) rigorous external examination of fidelity data that will expand the evidence base for this promising practice; and lastly, (g) will offer a model of practice for training equity leaders for national, widespread dissemination.

**(2) Professional Development with Sufficient Quality, Intensity, and Duration**

The *quality* of the Equity Leadership Series is demonstrated in these key professional development (PD) components: (1) Learning Sessions, (2) Job-Embedded Coaching, (3) Measurement of Progress, (4) Micro-Credentials, and (5) Whole System Engagement. These elements are woven into a project design that will ensure participants have time for *intense* learning by starting in the summer and continuing through job-embedded application of techniques and supported engagement with their school-based teams for the *duration* of two years (see **Appendix E**, Figure 8, Task Timeline).

**PD Core Component 1: Learning Sessions.** The Learning Session schedule for this project allow Principals to begin with time for an intense focus on developing new competencies. Beginning in August 2019 and each subsequent project year, one cohort of Principals will participate in this two-day learning session. Next, in October 2019 and each subsequent project year, they will participate in a second two-day learning session. Finally, in January 2020 and each subsequent project year the Principal and **their school team** will engage in a third two-day learning session. The time between sessions allows Principals to try out new competencies and prepare for the next session. Table 1 show the scope and sequence and descriptions follow.

Table 1. *Equity Leadership Series: Learning Session Scope and Sequence*

<b>Learning Session 1 AUGUST</b>	<b>Learning Session 2 OCTOBER</b>	<b>Learning Session 3 JANUARY</b>
--------------------------------------	---------------------------------------	---------------------------------------



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Strong &amp; Engaged Equity Leaders</li> <li>• Building Equity-based MTSS through Leadership Teaming</li> <li>• Developing Highly Effective Reciprocal Communication</li> <li>• Developing Effective Distributed Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective Use of School-wide Data</li> <li>• Building Strong Equity-based Educator Systems</li> <li>• Creating a Professional Learning Culture</li> <li>• Using Positive &amp; Strengths-based Personnel Evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laying Foundations for School-wide MTSS</li> <li>• Building School Teams for Laying Foundations for MTSS</li> <li>• Structuring for School-wide MTSS Implementation</li> <li>• Building School Teams for Structuring MTSS Implementation</li> </ul>
--	---	--

**Session 1 (AUGUST).** The *Building Strong & Engaged Equity Leaders* unit will begin moving Principals from their current functions as administrative leaders to becoming strong, school-based Equity Leaders who serve the complete range of student learning needs; engage with faculty, staff, and specialized educators to improve teaching and learning; and lead by design with a clear vision that guides instructional outcomes. In *Building Equity-based MTSS through Leadership Teaming* they will learn methods for building and leading a school-based team that actively supports organizational transformation and installation of evidence-based practices to improve student outcomes (in this case, equity-based MTSS). Next, they will learn how *Developing Highly Effective Reciprocal Communication* fosters an environment supporting open communication and an exchange of ideas among all school stakeholders so the school community, including students, feel safe and supported to share ideas, contribute to decisions, and speak up to school leaders. Finally, they will explore *Developing Effective Distributed Leadership* that empowers school-based teams by delegating authority for key decisions directly related to the teams' primary functions.

**Session 2 (OCTOBER).** The *Effective Use of School-wide Data* unit will teach Principals the importance of simultaneous analysis of data related to student outcomes, fidelity of implementation, and capacity to implement. They will learn techniques for using these data in

continuous improvement cycles to inform decisions, monitor progress, evaluate outcomes, and make adjustments such as reorganizing staff, reallocating resources, or planning professional learning. In *Building Strong Equity-based Educator Systems* session Principals will learn a formal, structured coaching system that strengthens teaching and learning; discuss differences between informal and formal coaching systems and how coaching services operate; and explore use of such tools as checklists, feedback records, and video-capturing tools to model, teach, and learn new teaching methods. Next, Principals will explore how *Creating a Professional Learning Culture* for all staff, including adults in a variety of roles in the school, and discuss how to break down such barriers such as scheduling or contractual provisions that impede professional learning opportunities; how to include paraeducators and other staff in professional learning activities; and generally, promote a dynamic learning environment that includes diverse stakeholders, respects professional literacies, and allows for merging of cultural and institutional belief patterns. Last in this session is a unit about *Using Positive & Strengths-based Personnel Evaluation* in which Principals will learn to create personnel evaluation processes that are positive, structured, and focused on improving teaching and learning, even when districts and other entities may require certain processes, timelines, and structures.

**Session 3 (JANUARY).** Learning sessions continue with Principals and adds school-based team participation in the last three units of the session. This session will be previewed with all district staff in the first year through a foundation building introduction to MTSS (see below, PD Core Component 5). District leaders move from shadowing to becoming Equity Leaders who provide some of the content instruction. In the first unit, *Laying Foundations for School-wide MTSS*, district personnel will demonstrate their capacity to develop Principals to understand the why and how MTSS is implemented, sustained, and scaled-up throughout the district. Next,

*Building School Teams for Laying Foundations for MTSS* unit is the same as that of the prior unit, but will be directed to the knowledge and roles of school-based teams. Principals and their school-based teams have the opportunity to engage in the process of developing a shared understanding of MTSS purposes and processes. The *Structuring for School-wide MTSS Implementation* unit will provide the Principals and their teams a chance to practice data-based conversations to identify priorities and steps needed to achieve sustainable transformation. Finally, in *Building School Teams for Structuring MTSS Implementation*, together they will start co-creating a plan to implement priorities identified in the previous unit.

**PD Core Component 2: Job-embedded Coaching.** Effective coaching offers a powerful approach to improving learning and achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Therefore, to continue developing Principals equity leadership capacities, project staff, university partners, and district leaders will extend professional development from the Learning Sessions into the real-world context of the school with sustained personal contact and support (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Guskey, 2000). This purposeful communication comes at a time when Principals are still growing into their roles as Equity Leaders and school practices are simultaneously shifting. For coaching calls project staff will use the partnership principles coaching model—equality, choice, dialogue, reflection, and reciprocity (Knight, 2018). The intensity of these activities will be differentiated based on individual and situational needs (Fixsen et al., 2009), ranging from basic check-ins to specialized support to address issues common to transformation, and to highly individualized support for unique needs for two school years after beginning participation. This coaching system was effectively used in previously identified studies and works well to create a system of support without requiring a lot of time on the part of Principals.

**PD Core Component 3: Measurement.** In the spirit of using data to make decisions, the Equity Leadership Series will use two related measurement tools will to help Principals and their teams to understand their current practices, set priorities for implementation, and monitor their progress or stage of implementation for target practices (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005) as well as the fidelity with which they are using previously implemented practices (Hulleman & Cordray, 2009). First, a technically validated fidelity assessment, Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation Fidelity of Implementation Tool, or SWIFT-FIT (Algozzine et al., 2016; Morsbach-Sweeney et al., 2014), will be administered by project staff to provide baseline and annual rigorous examinations of how close to standard the school is using equity-based MTSS (McCart et al., 2014). Second, at least twice during the year the Principals and their teams will perform a self-assessment of their stage of implementation for key elements of equity-based MTSS using SWIFT Fidelity Integrity Assessment (SWIFT-FIA; SWIFT Center, 2013), which is highly correlated with external research and SWIFT-FIT. SWIFT-FIA prompts structured conversation and a review of evidence leading to a group-determined rating of each item as either Laying the Foundation, Installing, Implementing, or Sustaining. The teams will use SWIFT-FIT and FIA data to help define current strengths and identify next steps, document improvement progress and guide continuous improvement plans, which are important input to coaching and project evaluation.

**PD Core Component 4: Micro Credentials.** The Equity Leadership Series will create authentic artifacts (e.g., inclusive master schedules, equity focused tiered intervention matrix, evidence-based resource map) that Principals can use to demonstrate their leadership capacities. These artifacts can be submitted to the Equity Leadership Institute micro-credential system. Initially, the project staff, university partners, and districts will work together to extend SWIFT's

digital badging system to be regionally recognized in personnel systems. Over the course of five years the project staff will work with the four districts' state education agencies, partner universities and professional associations, including Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), to gain national recognition and portability.

**PD Core Component 5: Whole System Engagement.** The Equity Leadership Series will establish whole system engagement and system coherence by holding an Equity Leadership Summit each year. At the Summit district leaders, project teams (see Management section), university partners, and Advisory Group members (see Collaboration subsection) will together strengthen and advance the Equity Leadership Series through networking and continuous learning. Each year they will celebrate accomplishments, learn about new research, and engage in continuous improvement feedback activities to ensure the project remains on course to achieve the anticipated outcomes. District capacity will grow and be measured during the Equity Leadership Series. District leaders will “shadow” project staff to build their own competencies and capacity to assume the responsibility of maintain the Equity Leadership Series. Additionally, a member of the project staff will meet with district leaders quarterly to ensure the professional development work remains aligned with district priorities and systems; and to make small course corrections as needed. During the annual Summit, the Evaluation & Continuous Improvement Team will provide data-based updates on the project and any preliminary study finding. This aspect of the project will give way to lasting implementation long after the project ends.

Finally, project staff will provide each district an “all hands” professional development introduction to MTSS to establish broad understanding and enthusiasm for a developing an equity leadership culture and to develop understanding about who will be selected to participate

and why and begin to lay the foundation for district wide strength in MTSS. Follow-up “all hands” foundational events will be held to address the emerging priorities relevant to each district’s context. Within each district there are layers of influence that impact one another in the system. By inviting all members within the district to participate in the transformation process we create an energy around building Equity Leaders that is nested within a climate of MTSS transformation. This activity helps with the ‘heavy lift’ Principals often face with bringing their teams into current evidence-based practice. By offering this addition to the learning series directed at all staff we help to create the transformation culture.

The five PD components (learning sessions, coaching, measurement, micro-credentials, whole system engagement) are directly aligned with current research on high quality, sufficient intensity and duration professional development and are aligned with PD definitions outlined in the RFP and include the following:

<b>Criteria for High Quality Professional Development</b>	<b>Evidenced in the Equity Leadership Series</b>
Integral part of school and LEA strategies to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging State academic standards	<b>P</b>
Sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and school and classroom-focused	<b>P</b>
Improve knowledge of the academic subjects (2) understanding of how students learn; and (3) ability to analyze student work and achievement from multiple sources, including how to adjust instructional strategies, assessments, and materials based on such analysis	<b>P</b>
Integral part of broad schoolwide and districtwide educational improvement plans	<b>P</b>
Personalized plans for each Principal to address the specific needs identified in observation or other feedback	<b>P</b>
Advance Principal understanding of: (1) Effective instructional strategies that are Evidence-Based; and (2) strategies for improving student academic achievement or substantially increasing the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers	<b>P</b>
Contextualized for each unique district, school, climate and culture	<b>P</b>

Criteria for High Quality Professional Development	Evidenced in the Equity Leadership Series
Involve the forming of partnerships with Institutions of Higher Education	P
Include instruction in ways that Principal may work more effectively with parents and families	P
Designed to give teachers of children with disabilities knowledge and skills to provide instruction and academic support services, to those children, including positive behavioral interventions and supports, multi-tier system of supports, and use of accommodations	P
Designed to give Principals of English learners knowledge and skills to provide instruction and appropriate language and academic support services to those children, including the appropriate use of curricula and assessments	P
Regularly evaluate Principals for their impact on increased teacher effectiveness and improved student academic achievement, with the findings of the evaluations used to improve the quality of professional development	P

In summary, the Equity Leadership Series is a high quality professional development practice comprised of *intense* learning sessions for Principals with links to their district and their school-based teams; hands-on, school-based experiences with a *two year duration* of job-embedded coaching to install meaningful systems and practices; valid data to use in decision making and to demonstrate the real-world, schoolwide impact of their equity leadership, and micro-credentials that demonstrate personal mastery of equity leadership competencies. The PD components and related measures allow for high quality, evidence-based professional development with the promise of meaningful and positive student growth across all students.

**(3) Collaboration with Partners for Maximizing the Effectiveness**

This project uses several collaborative structures to maximize effectiveness: university partnerships, an Advisory Group, dissemination of curated open access resources via an accessible website, and the previously described district engagement. First, The University of Kansas SWIFT Education Center brings to the collaboration the intellectual property and expertise for delivering Equity Leadership Series, content expertise in equity-based MTSS,

validated measurement tools, and a web-based digital badging system to leverage into a micro-credential system (**Appendix E**, Figure 7). The other four universities are regionally paired with the participating high need districts: University of Oregon (Portland Public Schools), University of Mississippi (Meridian Public Schools), Boise State (Teton County Schools), and University of Southern California (San Diego Unified) for increased cultural relevancy (e.g., familiarity with local systems and values), coaching support, and contextualized learning; and for district support and infrastructure after project end. Further, this collaboration will minimize participant travel costs thus allowing more funds to be directed to professional development activities. Ultimately, the collaboration will build shared understanding of the Equity Leadership Series in a way that will influence leadership programs and create a structure for ongoing dissemination of the Equity Leadership Series beyond the life of the grant, thereby enlarging and extending project impact.

Next, the Advisory Group comprised of equity leaders will network with district leaders at Equity Leadership Summits as well as provide informed, unbiased feedback to the project team for continuous project improvement. These Advisors will be collaborative connections for identifying and vetting equity leadership resources to post to the open access, online resource repository in support of participants and anyone else interested in equity leadership.

Additionally, these Advisory members represent a diversity that is matched with the needs of our district partners. These individuals are leaders in the field with a strong relationship with the SWIFT Education Center (see **Appendix E**, Table 6 for list of partners).

#### **(4) *Services Provided with Focus on those with Greatest Needs***

Principals have a variety of needs met through professional development, but for those leading high need schools, their greatest need is improved student academic, social/behavioral, and life outcomes. Few available Principal development options are directly tied to improved student outcomes. In addition, they are often designed to meet the needs of the largest “markets”



or least common denominator among all markets—rarely are they rooted in the unique contexts and cultures that will result in effective application. Nor do available options bring school-based teams into the process—creating that elusive “stakeholder buy-in” Principals seek. Most do not have useful tools that Principals can carry into practice, nor real and meaningful ways to measure their school’s progress toward organizational goals for improving student outcomes. The Equity Leadership Series addresses these common needs of Principals.

*To ensure this project is focused on Principals with the greatest needs*, the Principal Investigator (PI) reached out to select district superintendents serving concentrations of high need schools where Equity Leadership could make the largest impact. She conducted cursory needs assessment (interviews, conversations, and student data reviews) to determine a match for this project. The PI selected two large high need districts (San Diego Unified in California, Portland Public Schools in Oregon) and two small high need districts (Meridian School District in Mississippi, Teton County School District in Wyoming) with clear need and value-match for implementing the Equity Leadership Series.

These districts, and many like them, have difficulty accessing high quality professional development for Principals. They struggle to recruit and retain highly qualified educator due to community poverty or limited fiscal capacity for compensation (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011; Jacob, 2007; Monk, 2007); or despite low turnover, have experienced numerous false starts and develop an “initiative fatigue” mindset. Inevitably, districts large and small, urban and rural must have Principals who are immediately ready to respond to the high needs of their students. This necessitates effective professional development delivered in a manner that understands the unique context of each district. Rural districts have the added challenge of being located far from airports or major highways, making hiring high-quality national professional

developers difficult and expensive. Moreover, sending Principals to conferences and other professional learning opportunities is also a challenge. Getting to the location of a conference may take extra time, requiring them to be away for long time spans. Urban districts, under pressure to make fast improvement, often get lost in the multitude of initiatives and Principals get lost in trying to decide where everything fits and what is likely to have the largest impact.

Students with high needs and their families require Principals to possess specialized skills for the context and community. Many rural districts educate children of highly-transient, low-income migrant families (Monk, 2007). Urban districts more frequently educate students from a variety of nations who speak many different languages, making communication with students and families a greater challenge (Jacob, 2007). Frequent staff turnover in urban settings and professional stagnation in rural settings is common due to factors such as these, thus districts in both rural and urban areas must continuously revisit professional development for their staff. Below are brief descriptions of the selected districts' demographic makeup illustrating the nature of their students' high need for improved school leadership (see **Appendix E**, Table 2). These districts were selected based on high student need, desire for growth and development of Equity Leaders and the location of their districts, ensuring the project covers both urban and rural contexts.

*San Diego Unified (SDU)*, the second largest district in California, operates in 226 educational facilities with 13,559 employees serving 129,380 students. Approximately 60% of students in SDU qualify for free/reduced lunch status and nearly a quarter of students receive English Language Learning services. The Smarter Balanced Assessment from 2017 shows only 55.6% of students are meeting or exceeding standards in ELA and 46.0% in mathematics. A closer look reveals disproportionately low achievement for black and Hispanic students in SDU.

Although 76.0% of students who identify as White met or exceeded standard in ELA, only 37.3% of students who identify as Black and 40.3% of students who identify as Hispanic met the same standard. A similar trend can be observed in mathematics. 75.4% of students who are White met or exceeded standard compared to a mere 25.4% of students who are Black and 29.7% of students who are Hispanic (San Diego Unified, 2017). SDU student suspension and expulsion data further indicate that “(w)hile African American students comprised only 9 percent of the population in 2014-15, they represented 24 percent of suspensions. Hispanic students represented 47 percent of the student population and 54 percent of suspensions” (San Diego Unified, 2015). More than half of students in SDU identify as Hispanic and Black (56.7%), exposing the need for increased focus on equitable leadership to change school culture and student outcomes.

*Portland Public Schools.* PPS is one of the largest districts in the Pacific Northwest, serving over 48,000 students in 79 schools. They employ approximately 7,600 individuals, including 173 licensed school administrators. PPS has a Superintendent and eight school board members, one representing each of the seven zones and one additional student representative. PPS has an Assistant Superintendent who oversees 10 Senior Directors who work directly with school-based leaders. Nearly a quarter of students in PPS are eligible for free/reduced meals, more than 15% qualify for special education services, and more than 7% of students receive services for English Language Learning. The areas of greatest need in PPS are student outcomes in English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, and behavior. Smarter Balanced Assessment results reveal only 61% of students met or exceeded standards in ELA (PPS, 2017a) and only 50% scoring in the same range for mathematics (PPS, 2017b). Discipline and behavior data indicate disproportionate expulsions or out-of-school suspensions among students who identify as African American and

Multiple Races (excluding Asian and White). The difference in the relative rate of expulsion or suspension for African Americans compared to White is a staggering 4.3; and for Multiple Races (excluding Asian and White) compared to White is 2.6 (PPS, 2018). Recent budget changes and decreases in student enrollment increase the difficulty for PPS to meet academic and behavioral needs of students. For example, the district proposed cuts to teaching and central office staff in order to balance the new, reduced funding (Barnes, 2017). Despite these hardships, PPS is committed to educational equity and the success of all students with leadership from Principals and teacher leaders.

*Teton County School District*, located just east of the Idaho state boarder and home to Yellowstone National Park in the community of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The District serves 2,770 students in nine schools—six elementary, one middle, and two high schools. A total of 16.6% of students in Teton receive services for English Language Learning and 10.6% have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The area of greatest need in Teton is student outcomes in Reading and Math. The Comprehensive Statewide Assessment System results for 2016-2017 reveal only 65.8% of 8th grade students were proficient or advanced in reading (Wyoming Department of Education, 2017a) and only 60.7% scoring in the same range for Math (Wyoming Department of Education, 2017b). Closer examination of the data reveal disproportionate numbers of students who qualify for special education and those who qualify for free/reduced meals not reaching state proficiency standards. Only 51.4% of students who qualify for free/reduced meals and 22.2% of students with IEPs met proficiency standards in Reading. The figures are similar for Math, with only 36.1% of students who qualify for free/reduced meals and 22.2% of students with IEPs meeting proficiency standards. Despite these hardships, Teton is committed to educational equity and the success of

all students. Increasing student achievement and equity will require additional support to Teton leaders.

*Meridian School District* (Meridian) in Mississippi serves more than 5,700 students and employs approximately 1,000 certified and classified staff. Certified staff recruitment and retention are current challenges they are addressing through a program titled “Teach Meridian”. More than 80% of Meridian students qualify for free/reduced meals, a rate that is nearly 20 percentage points higher than Mississippi state average. Such high levels of community poverty require extraordinary school services to ensure students’ needs are met. Meridian offers a free breakfast and lunch to every student during the school year and is part of the Summer Food Service program funded by the US Department of Agriculture. This program provides an average of 1,175 lunches and 1,026 breakfasts per day in the summer months to children and their families (Neary, 2017). Student academic outcomes are a challenge in Meridian. The Mississippi Academic Assessment Program 2017 results indicate only 46.6% of 8th graders received a passing score or higher on ELA and 59.0% on math assessments (Mississippi Department of Education Division of Research and Development, 2017), which ranks Meridian as tied for 119th out of 146 districts. This equity series will offer clear pathways for Principals to develop leadership strategies resulting in increased student outcomes.

**(5) *Project Appropriate to Address Target Population Needs***

The previously described student outcome data demonstrate the selected districts are in need of immediate support. The Equity Leadership Series is perfectly situated to address the disproportionality and student achievement needs of each district through leadership to implement MTSS to support the needs of all students. The hands-on learning that will occur while implementing MTSS means Principals will have a deeper understanding of leadership rooted in their own school experience. The issues of disproportionality begin in the first learning

session and run as a theme through the last. The job-embedded coaching offers Principals the opportunity to determine the nature and content of coaching sessions and have on-going communication with a professional confidant who can provide feedback through the transformation process. We have established a sufficiently strong relationship with District Leadership that the Equity Learning Series will be contextually and culturally responsive, well aligned with district priorities, co-created and continuously improved through district contact. We expect rapid project ramp up.

## **B. Significance**

### ***(1) Magnitude of Project Results on Needed Student Achievement Improvements***

This project aims to increase the positive effect of equity leadership on implementation of MTSS and on student academic outcomes and related behavioral outcomes (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Based on peer-reviewed, promising evidence (Choi, et al., 2017; Kozleski & Choi, 2018), as defined by the WWC, we can confidently predict that the Equity Leadership Series will enable Principals and their school-teams to install equity-based MTSS that will have a statistically significant, positive effect on all students/all subgroups in ELA and Math achievement. These studies found that this promising practice (McCart et al. 2016) improved Administrative Leadership, and in turn, Administrative Leadership was significantly related to student academic outcomes as mediated through MTSS.

A leadership study in schools implementing equity-based MTSS found that targeted technical assistance significantly improved schools' leadership SWIFT-FIT scores (Kozleski & Choi, 2018). Schools that opted to receive assistance in leadership ( $n = 17, M = 0.33, SD = 0.31$ ) compared with schools that did not ( $n = 42, M = 0.13, SD = 0.19$ ) showed improvement on SWIFT-FIT 'Strong and Engaged Site Leadership' feature that was significantly higher than the other schools in the study,  $t(21.31) = 2.49, p < 0.05$ . Further, analysis of data from the subset of

these schools that administered the same state assessment ( $n = 31$ ), Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College Careers [PARCC]), revealed that SWIFT-FIT Administrative Leadership scores significantly and positively predicted PARCC ELA ( $\gamma_{\#} = 35.06, p < .05$ ) and Math ( $\gamma_{\#} = 51.79, p < .01$ ) scores. Administrative Leadership significantly predicted Math scores even when individual student characteristics (i.e., disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ELL) were held constant in multi-leveling modeling ( $\gamma_{\#} = 77.30, p < .01$ ).

Additional promising evidence for the Equity Leadership Series found in Choi et al. (2017), demonstrated that in schools where Principals received the professional development to install equity-based MTSS, they found a statistically significant effect on state assessment Math score growth for three implementation years versus a comparison group of schools in the same school district,  $\beta = 1.2, t = 1.96, p = .05$  (standardized coefficient = 0.63). Further, state assessment Math scores of students with disabilities in three schools that implemented equity-based MTSS with fidelity increased over each interval at a greater rate (3.99 points) than their peers in the three comparison group schools ( $p < 0.05$ ). A Sobel's z test showed that Administrative Leadership improvement mediated the relationship between technical assistance and improvement of MTSS,  $z = 2.93, p < 0.01$  (Choi, McCart, Hicks, & Sailor, 2018a). Therefore, we are confident that the proposed Equity Leadership Series will enable Principals to lead organizational transformations that produce long-term improved student outcomes.

**(2) Reasonable Costs in Relation to Persons to be Served and to Anticipated Results**

The five year funding request of \$17.2M along with the cost share of \$5.7M equals a total cost of \$22.9M for the proposed service and research, which equates to **\$123 per student** in the participating districts. The detailed goals, objectives and outcomes anticipate 70 Principals will complete the Equity Leadership Series with secondary development of about 800 district and

school-based team members as partners in schoolwide transformation, equating to a total cost of \$26.3K per person. When factoring in a very conservative estimate of 4,000 staff who will attend districtwide professional development events, the cost per person is only **\$6K per participant** or 22,000 staff who have the opportunity to attend, **\$1K** per person. We anticipate based on previous success with resource development for the field, our website's traffic by the end of five years that at least 250,000 people will avail themselves of the open access, online resource repository. With WWC status, the Equity Leadership Series concepts be available for wide use in other districts across the nation, as will the micro-credential system. Therefore, we assert the cost of this project designed to result in a reasonable cost/benefit ratio.

**(3) *Potential for Project Incorporation at End of Federal Funding***

The Equity Leadership Series is designed to build individual equity leadership capacities among Principals, and to develop district staff and school-based teams to sustain and expand equity leadership philosophy and practice in their school culture and as an enduring value in the whole local education system. As described in the Project Design section, district leaders will shadow and eventually take over professional learning leadership roles. Over the course of five years, we anticipate some turnover among the district leaders as well as expanded reach of the project within the district staff that will require continued professional development that districts will be prepared to lead. Further, we will help the district to build Equity Leadership qualities in their hiring and promotion systems. Over time, a strong fabric of equity leadership will develop and endure beyond this federal funding and project timeline. At the school level, sustainability will come from the team approach to transformation, distributed leadership practices embedded in the Equity Leadership Series, and hiring and promotion practices that value equity leadership.

**(4) *Dissemination that Enables Others to Use the Strategies***



Dissemination of Equity Leadership Series is central to the focus of this work. We strongly believe, based on promising evidence, that this project stands to have a large impact on the field through significantly improved student outcomes. Thus, Dissemination is listed as project **Goal 4** and will be evaluated and monitored in concert with other project goals. The dissemination plan includes broad-based web presence, a social media suite, an e-newsletter, publications in peer-reviewed leadership journals and practitioner journals and presentations at national conferences throughout the five-year project. The web presence will include the micro-credentialing system that will become transportable to other states and the open access repository of resources-vetted as the “best of the best” materials. The peer-reviewed journal articles and analyses will be submitted to WWC to certify as Moderate Evidence so that the practice concepts and elements will be available for replication and application in schools everywhere. Collaboration among the five university faculty members and the Advisory Group (including executives from Council of Chief State School Officers and National Association of State Directors of Special Education) will extend beyond the specifics of the tasks necessary to carry out this project to influence educational leadership programs, state certification systems, and other thought leadership will emerge and endure. Finally, this project will expand and continue to offer the Equity Leadership Series through grants, donations, and state and district contracts for as long as need exists and this professional development practice meets the need.

### **C. Quality of the Management Plan**

#### ***(1) Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes are Specified and Measurable***

To reiterate, the project’s four broad goals are to: (1) Develop Equity Leaders who transform school cultures and improve student outcomes; (2) Create district capacity to sustain and develop future Equity Leaders; (3) Establish What Works Clearinghouse Moderate Evidence for the Equity Leadership Series; (4) Disseminate nationally the Equity Leadership Series with

associated portable competency-based micro-credentialing. To achieve these goals, we specified a set of detailed, time bounded, and measurable objectives and a task and timeline chart (**Appendix E**, Table 3). The measurement tools referenced in this management plan are explained in the evaluation section of this proposal.

**(2) Management Plan to Achieve Objectives On Time & Within Budget**

Dr. McCart and Dr. Sailor will co-direct this project as co-leaders of the Equity Leadership Institute (see Appendix A for CV for named staff). Each Co-Director will actively participate to ensure milestones, objectives, and goals are achieved on time and within budget. They will be supportive of and accountable to one another in their distinct Equity Leadership roles. The organization will serve as a model of effective equity leadership practices, e.g., distributed leadership, teaming structure (see **Appendix E**, Figure 9, Organization Chart; Table 6, Project Staff Time Allocation; and Table 7, Project Partners). Dr. McCart will lead and be responsible for work done by three teams: Equity Leadership Development, Product Development and Communication, and Administrative. Dr. Sailor will be responsible for the and Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Team, collaboration with University partners, and the Advisory Group. The Co-Directors will share responsibility for regular communication with the Project Officers through bi-monthly conference calls, ad hoc telephone calls and emails, and quarterly and annual reports.

Dr. McCart will ensure on time and within budget administration of all grant responsibilities, including (a) project management, (b) cross team communication and coordination, (c) implementing necessary continuous improvement processes identified as formative course corrections; and (d) budgets and financial controls. In this management role, she will establish an internal monitoring process to track significant decisions, activities, and outcomes and contribute to continuous improvements for the project. Each team will hold

weekly meetings with advance agendas and minutes to inform the project management system of significant decisions and activities. Dr. McCart will facilitate a monthly cross-team meeting that will: a) provide opportunity for teams to share information, generate ideas, and make plans; b) establish annual Equity Leadership Institute agendas, including summarizing project outcomes for prior six months, identifying resources and barriers to accomplishing project goals and objectives, as well as strategies to build on progress and mitigate barriers (including as necessary budget and staff reallocations); and c) present performance data and educational results to Project Officers and other stakeholders. Lastly, Dr. McCart will meet bi-monthly with the Administration Team members to review financial status and ensure all planned activities can be accomplished within budget. With the flexibility inherent in this management system, the project will be able to quickly and effectively adjust activities to meet partner and Equity Leader needs.

Dr. Sailor will coordinate all aspects of the Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Team support and will lead ongoing formative evaluation with program indicators to ensure quality work that meets work-scope, budgetary and time requirements. This team will provide data to other teams to make decisions and support them in the Rapid Cycle Improvement described in the Evaluation section, wherein each meeting will maintain a focus on efforts to measure, report, and evaluate effectiveness. Dr. Sailor will be the primary liaison with partner university faculty around micro credentialing, evaluation studies, and scholarly dissemination activities; their roles in instruction and coaching will be directed through the Equity Leadership Development Group. Dr. Sailor will also provide leadership and guidance to the Equity Leadership Advisory Group to ensure a cohesive leadership series aligned with other national organizations, community, and family leaders (see Advisory Group below).

This overall organizational structure with distributed leadership has proven to be successful in previous projects lead by these Co-Directors and key personnel (swiftschools.org). Dr. McCart and Dr. Sailor have worked together for more than 18 years and have extensive experience at leading federal education initiatives, and together will meet the project timelines and milestones found in Appendix E, Table 3. In addition to the clearly defined management responsibilities for the Co-Directors, other key personnel (see Appendix A) will be flexible members of the project teams.

**Equity Leadership Development Team.** With Dr. McCart’s direction and support, Dr. Miller and Dr. Meisenheimer will create and implement the three Equity Leadership Series sessions, including the previously described Sessions 1 and 2 for Principals and Session 3 with coordinated professional learning series for school based teams. They will also be responsible to ensure each district supports and provides accompanying leadership to the schools with involvement from university partners associated with this team. This team will deliver the Equity Leadership Series, including the leadership coaching of Principals and district personnel, who will eventually continue the practice of building Equity Leaders in their communities.

**Product Development and Communication Team.** Dr. McCart will lead this team to create and manage digital platforms and tools including the development of micro-credentialing, website and other communication media. Ms. Woods, Dr. Satter, and other team members will produce and disseminate Equity Leadership tools and develop and manage resources needed to support the learning series and related school-based MTSS implementation tools and resources. This team will also support the vital internal communications functions of the management plan.

**Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Team.** Dr. Sailor will lead this team with Dr. Choi, Dr. Pollitt, and Dr. Hicks. They will prepare tools and organize administration of fidelity

of implementation assessments, collect and analyze program indicator data, oversee the longitudinal data and provide formative and summative assessment to the project Co-Directors for the Rapid Cycle Improvement. This team will also be responsible for preparing the OII-required annual performance reports. University partners will participate in the evaluation study and peer-review publication writing activities of this team.

**Administration Team.** Dr. McCart with Dr. Mitchiner will lead this team to ensure all financial obligations and controls are met, and on-time preparation of budgets and financial reports. This team will be responsible for ensuring all data privacy, security, and human subject protections are observed throughout the life of the project.

**Equity Leadership Advisory Group.** Dr. Sailor will lead this group to ensure the voices of national stakeholders, equity organizations and family/community stakeholders are authentically represented throughout. This group will meet in person or by video quarterly to strengthen leadership series. Confirmed members of the Equity Leadership Advisory Group, organizational affiliations, and positions are: Dr. Linda Beitz (Solutions through Dialog), Maria De La Vega (East Palo Alto, CA, retired Principal), Dr. Ivonne Dibblee (Portland Public Schools, Principal), Dr. Bill East (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Executive Director), Dr. Rob Horner (University of Oregon, Professor), Dr. Elizabeth Kozleski (University of Kansas, Professor of Special Education), Dr. Andrea Mayfield (Arrow Academy of Excellence, Principal); Dr. James McLeskey (University of Florida, Carissa Miller (Chief State School Officers); Dr. Mary Morningstar (University of Kansas, Professor of Special Education); Richard Nyankori (SPEDex, CEO), Dr. Carol Quirk (Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, CEO), Dr. Seena Skelton (Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center, Director).

(3) ***Procedures for Ensuring Feedback and Continuous Improvement in Project Operations***

As indicated, the Co-Directors highly value and rely on feedback and continuous improvement cycles to ensure projects objectives are met. There is an identified and budgeted team with the responsibility to ensure data-based Rapid Cycle Improvement and annual reviews are a part of the way the whole project is managed (see **Appendix E**, Figure 10). Additionally, this team ensure upmost standards of data privacy and security are met.

#### **D. Quality of the Project Evaluation**

Evaluation of the Equity Leadership Series will include (a) ongoing progress monitoring of implementation (formative evaluation) and (b) project effectiveness evaluation (summative evaluation). Formative evaluation will involve a formal annual review of status vis-à-vis the project Goals and Objectives in **Appendix E**, Table 3. During the year the Co-Directors and Evaluation & Continuous Improvement Team also will employ Rapid Cycle Improvement (RCI) monitoring current status and continuous feedback to improve project implementation (see part (2) below). Included in the project objectives are the four rigorous analyses and hypothesis testing necessary to achieve Goal 3, Establish WWC Evidence, which are described first, below.

##### ***(1) Methods of Evaluation to Produce Evidence of Effectiveness***

The studies described below produce evidence of effectiveness for developing Equity Leaders (that is, Goal 1) with respect to differences between the Cohorts 1 and 2 (immediate implementation and Cohorts 3 and 4 (wait-listed implementation) schools with respect to their student outcomes, their school leadership qualities, the relationship of these changes to equity-based MTSS and the fidelity of implementation of the professional development series. The approach and plans for these four studies follow. Power analysis appears in Appendix F.

Summative evaluation will begin with a group randomized control trial using a wait-list design (Coalition for Evidence-based Policy, 2003) to evaluate the effectiveness of the Equity Leadership Series. Simple randomization is insufficient due to the project's small-sample context

(i.e., small number of schools). We will group schools in each district into matching pairs based on prognostic covariates (e.g., school size, serving grade levels). Within matched pairs, we will randomly assign schools in each district to one of four cohorts. Cohorts 1 and 2 will be an immediate implementation group (i.e., Cohort 1 will start participation in project fourth quarter Year 1 and Cohort 2 will start fourth quarter Year 2), (b) the other 2 cohorts will be a wait-list group starting the series in Years 3 and 4. This wait-list design has an ethical advantage in that it will allow wider access to the Equity Leadership Series than a simple randomized control trial wherein some participants never receive the intervention (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). At the same time, this design will meet What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards. Baseline equivalence will be assessed at the beginning of implementation. Matched pair randomization is expected to balance the mean baseline, and the differences between the immediate implementation and wait-list groups expected to be less than 0.25 standard deviations. Remaining imbalances will be treated with covariate adjustment during analysis. Based on this plan, five evaluation studies will produce evidence of effectiveness. The research questions, data sources, variables, and analysis plan for each study follows.

### **Study 1: Student Outcomes**

*Research Question 1.* What were the effects of Equity Leadership Series on student ELA and Math achievements in immediate implementation group schools in comparison to wait-list group schools? *Data Sources.* Individual students' annual state assessment scores

*Research Question 2.* What were the effects of Equity Leadership Series on student behavior performance in immediate implementation group schools in comparison to wait-list group schools? *Data Sources.* Individual students' in-school and out-of-school suspension data

*Dependent Variables.* Longitudinal student academic and behavior data will serve as dependent variables. Individual student outcome data will be collected from districts annually: (a) four waves of annual state assessment scores in ELA and Math; (b) four waves of annual in-school and out-of-school suspension (incidences and days).

*Covariates.* Student level covariates will include: (a) disability status, (b) free and reduced meals status, (c) race, (d) gender, (e) grade, (f) English language learner status, and (g) immediate/wait-list group status. School-level covariates will be: (a) enrollment size and (b) aggregate student demographic data.

*Analysis* Because student outcome data come from sets of nested units (i.e., schools), three-level multilevel modeling (level 1: repeated observations; level 2: student level; level 3: school level) is appropriate to evaluate the major outcome effectiveness. The analysis will be conducted to analyze individual student performance changes over time and its interaction effect with the immediate/wait-list group status.

## **Study 2: School Leadership Change**

We expect changes in school leadership qualities as a result of Equity Leadership Series completion, and this leadership change will precede student outcomes. The leadership quality is measured by Principal and school-based team activities, which provide educator empowerment (Algozzine et al., 2017).

*Research Question 3.* To what extent did the school leadership score change in immediate group schools in comparison to wait-list group schools? *Data Sources.* SWIFT-FIT

*Research Question 4.* To what extent did educator support system feature change in immediate group schools in comparison to wait-list group schools? *Data Sources.* SWIFT-FIT,



*Analysis.* School leadership change will be measured with SWIFT-FIT (Morsbach Sweeney et al. 2014). SWIFT-FIT was designed to measure the extent to which school personnel are using equity-based MTSS practices that align with SWIFT domains and features. For this specific research question, Administrative Leadership domain (including Engaged Site Leadership and Educator Support System) scores will be reviewed and analyzed. The difference between immediate and wait-list group scores will be analyzed with *t*-test and effect size calculation. Descriptive statistics will be used to review each school's fidelity of implementation by domain and feature subscales, and item scores.

### **Study 3: Relationship Among Leadership, MTSS, and Student Outcomes**

The Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Team will explore the relationship between leadership quality and equity-based MTSS processes and practices. This work will include the study of whether MTSS and/or other instructional practices are mediating the impact of equity leadership on student outcomes.

*Research Question 5.* To what extent was leadership improvement related to installation of equity-based MTSS processes and practices? *Data Sources.* SWIFT-FIT, Classroom Observation.

*Research Question 6.* Did equity-based MTSS processes and practices mediate the effect of leadership on student outcomes? *Data Sources.* SWIFT-FIT, Classroom Observation, State Assessments, Suspension Records

*Predictor, Mediator, and Dependent Variables.* School leadership and MTSS implementation status will be measured by SWIFT-FIT. A classroom observation tool will be developed as a walk-through checklist and used to measure instructional practice in five randomly selected classrooms every quarter in each school after the Principal completes the

Learning Sessions part of the series. The observation tool will incorporate a 5-point rating scale to check educators' utilization of instructional strategies for inclusive education (e.g., UDL, differentiated instruction, and peer-assisted learning) in classroom settings. This walk-through checklist will be completed by the Principals. For the RQ5 analysis, Administrative Leadership domain score in SWIFT-FIT will serve as a predictor variable and the classroom observation score will serve as a dependent variable. For RQ6, school-level aggregated student outcome data (i.e., state assessment scores and suspension data) will serve as dependent variables, SWIFT-FIT or classroom observation score will serve as a predictor, and SWIFT-FIT MTSS feature or classroom observation checklist score will serve as a mediator.

*Analysis.* RQ5 will employ Pearson's correlation analysis to investigate the relationship between leadership and MTSS/instructional practices for equitable education. For RQ6, Structural equation modeling with bootstrap analysis will be conducted to examine the mediation effect of MTSS processes and practices on the relationship between school leadership and student outcomes (Imai et al., 2010; Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

#### **Study 4: Professional Learning Delivery and Fidelity**

To monitor implementation, activities will be documented using a fidelity checklist that rates the extent to which activities cover the specified topics. The Evaluation Team will also assess participant satisfaction with the quantity, quality, usefulness, and relevance of the professional development and support we provide.

*Research Question 8.* To what degree was professional development provided with fidelity across schools? *Data Sources.* Activities log, feedback survey, fidelity checklists.

*Activities Log and Fidelity:* The Equity Leadership Development Team will complete an online activity logs for each contact with the district staff and Principals. The log questionnaire

will be developed to capture contact date, type (e.g., mentoring, , coaching), and target population (i.e., district staff, Principals). The online log will be managed through Qualtrics and will be modeled after a successfully implemented SWIFT fidelity checklist and activities log.

*Feedback Survey:* A survey will be developed to monitor participant’s satisfaction, perceived quality, usefulness, and relevance of Equity Leadership Series. This survey is a mechanism for district staff, Principals, and school-based team members to give feedback.

*Analysis.* Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize and review activities log, fidelity checklists, and feedback survey results.

These research questions, with related analyses offer effectiveness data for establishment of WWC moderate evidence. They also contribute to the overall formative and summative evaluation of project goals, objectives and outcomes. All studies will receive approval of the University of Kansas Internal Review Board.

(2) ***Methods of Evaluation Provide Performance Feedback & Periodic Assessment of Progress toward Outcomes***

Formative evaluation will utilize Rapid Cycle Improvement (RCI) for systematic and periodic assessment for continuous improvement. The major purpose of the cycle is to monitor progress toward intended outcomes and generate action plans which enable adaptation of implementation that may produce more effects within the limited implementation period. The cycle represents four components of formative evaluation (see **Appendix E**, Figure 10): process evaluation (quality of content, design and delivery/implementation); outcome evaluation (achievement of outcomes); learnings (barriers/enablers, nuances, surprises, causal explanations/mechanisms, feedback loops); and forward/outward focused evaluation questions (replication, sustainability, threats, opportunities) (Davidson, 2005). The Co-Directors have

extensive experience with this process and will regularly use it for project feedback and improvement. Additionally, it will be used in regular meetings with the OII Project Officer.

The Logic Model (see Appendix E, Figure 1) serves as a roadmap throughout the grant to ensure short term and long term outcomes are on track. The project objectives provide clear and definitive milestones and measurements for accountability as well as formative assessment and are linked to the logic model and RCI process. These guidance tools will be reviewed and revised quarterly by Co-Directors and the Evaluation & Continuous Improvement Team to ensure that data collected, analyzed and reported are used to guide project activities and ensure intended outcomes are met.

### **(3) *Evaluation Methods Use of Objective Performance***

The Evaluation Plan will use objective performance indicators and specific evaluation questions and performance targets guide each project goal for this project. The evaluation plan depicts both program (or GPRA) and additional project performance measures, including descriptions of the data sources, responsible data collection party, timelines for collection (see Appendix E, Table 4). The formative evaluation will target the process components of performance measures to produce information about the implementation, fidelity, quality, and stakeholder satisfaction with Equity Leadership Series services, resources, and tools. These data will inform continuous improvement opportunities and midcourse corrections, if necessary. The summative evaluation will measure: (a) the overall benefits of the Equity Leadership Series, and related project goals. This plan will ensure a clear and established quality of the Equity Leadership Series, engagement of district stakeholders, adherence to WWC for establishment of moderate evidence and widespread use and application of national audience via dissemination data. The project activities timeline helps to align with these data sources for project coherence.

The following table will be modified based on feedback from OII Project Officers and Evaluator team to include additional variables, if appropriate.

**(4) *Methods of Evaluation Provide Valid & Reliable Performance Data on Outcomes.***

These studies will be based on data describing student-level outcomes, school-level outcome, district capacities, and program activities. All data will be collected through valid and reliable methods, de-identified and stored securely. The following provides descriptions of measurement tools and data collection (see also **Appendix E**, Table 5).

**Students-level Outcome Data.** Summative annual state assessments with their previously published content validity and reliability will be used for student level ELA and Math outcomes (e.g., Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, Mississippi Assessment Program, etc.). To investigate student's behavior outcomes as it related to the school culture and academic outcomes in-school suspensions (ISS) and out-of-school suspensions (OSS) occurrences and days will be drawn from the district databases. These individual student-level data will be collected and analyzed as a student outcome; however, data will be aggregated for a school-level variable.

**School-level Outcome Data.** SWIFT-FIT (Morsbach Sweeney et al., 2014) data will measure leadership changes at a school level. The tool was developed to measure fidelity of implementation of an equity-based MTSS framework, including an essential Administrative Leadership domain/sub-scale. A technical adequacy evaluation (Algozzine et al., 2017) found the tool's average Content Validity Index (CVI) for school features ranged from 0.87 to 1.0, with above 0.78 being adequate when six or more experts rated the items collectively. Experts further independently rated the items and sub-scales as adequate. For Construct Validity, a subset of additional schools selected to be sampled initial partner schools and Knowledge Development Sites (KDS) selected on the basis of their advanced implementation of one or more key

components, were compared, and the results revealed that scores for the sampled partner schools ( $M = 37.83$ ,  $SD = 11.34$ ) and KDS ( $M = 57.94$ ,  $SD = 15.69$ ) differed in the desired direction ( $t = -2.32$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $ES = 1.77$ ) (Algozzine et al., 2017). To ensure quality data of SWIFT-FIT, two trained assessors concurrently collected SWIFT-FIT fidelity data on randomly selected 20% of the waves of data for each school and computed an Inter-Observer Agreement (IOA) to ensure data had satisfactory reliability, that is, a Cohen's Kappa Statistic above 60 will qualify as adequate IOA.

The previously mentioned **Classroom Observation Tool** (or walk-through checklist) will measure use of MTSS processes and practices. From among the participating schools we will randomly select five classrooms each quarter and ask the Principal to complete the checklist. To obtain IOA, a second assessor from the project team or district staff will concurrently conduct 20% of observations in each school.

**District Level Outcome.** A **District Capacity Assessment** with three subscales will monitor district progress in developing the capacity to provide and sustain Equity Leadership professional development and other initiatives.

**Project Activities.** Fidelity of implementation **checklist** is a self-report measure of the professional development activities (McCart et al., 2016). Checklists will be used for each major activity in the Equity Leadership Series (e.g., sessions, coaching). This measure will assess the extent to which activities are carried out as we planned. An **activities log** will capture and compile date, amount, and target population of learning series activities. Log questionnaire will be developed and data will be collected through Qualtrics.

### **Data Security and Protection**

We will apply the tools, knowledge, and experience we have with large national project data collection and analysis requirements to this project. Institute staff possess extensive experience

in data collection, analysis, and security protections as required in compliance with FERPA and other privacy regulations. Student level identifiable data collected will be subject to all the required provisions of a data use agreement outlined in FERPA. The highly secure RedCap software will be utilized for transfer and storage. It is housed on secured servers at the University of Kansas Computing Center. Identifiable data will only be available to a select few study members who have the need to access it for specific research purposes such as monitoring project outcomes and establishing WWC evidence. Digital consents, audio files, and transcripts of focus groups will be kept on secure computer that are encrypted and password protected. Consent forms will be kept in hard copy form in locked file drawers in a locked room.

#### **Absolute Priority 2(2)**

In response to *Absolute Priority 2 (2)*, the proposed evidence-based Equity Leadership Series will provide Principals, school-based team members and district leaders new or improved competencies and tools for leading implementation of evidence-based practices to meet *any* literacy, numeracy, remedial, or other needs of the district and the students they serve. We opted to make the subject of this effort one such practice, equity-based MTSS, because it is a core competency for Principals (CCSSO, 2017) that links directly to improved student outcomes. The proposed promising practice for developing Equity Leaders (McCart et al., 2016) will have enduring impact beyond the immediate installation of the evidence-based MTSS to the installation of the next big innovation in education.

#### **Invitational Priority Support Micro-Credentials**

Because this professional development approach is designed for currently active Principals, particularly those leading high need schools, we chose to address the *invitational priority for micro-credentials*. The enormous growth and development we witnessed among Principals engaged in this process during previous projects is difficult to quantify or describe on a resume.

Micro-credentials based on authentic, job-embedded achievements provides an ideal mechanism for publicly crediting Principals for their growth and achievements.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Equity Leadership Series was borne out of our deeply held commitment to equitable education for all students—defined as schools that support each and every student in a community and welcome them into a system of teaching and learning that is fluid, responsive, dynamic, alive, and uses all available resources to meet student needs (McCart, 2018).

Throughout our decades of research and support for struggling students we found that schooling is most successful when it is a dynamic structure that is fluid and responsive to the intellectual, linguistic, and cultural make up of each individual student is recognized and supported. Our observation and the data, however, convinced us that, while such a commitment is necessary, it is not sufficient. Equity Leaders, that is Principals in concert with their district and school-based teams, must do the hard work of transforming school culture, systems and practices if all students are going to experience improved outcomes. Likewise, sustaining culture and momentum for organizational change is difficult, given great variance in student need and teacher responsiveness and skill across time. For this reason, we developed, implemented, and collected data to provide Promising Evidence of this method for creating Equity Leaders for high need schools. We are eager to take this evidence to the Moderate level and begin disseminating it to schools from coast-to-coast for the benefit of students—students who struggle to learn, who live in poverty, who have been identified with disabilities, who are high achievers, who are learning English, who are refugees, who are undocumented, and who live in remote locations and in the urban core, and who just need more opportunities to show what they can do to make their mark in the world.