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Absolute Priorities and Competitive Preferences Priorities Addressed

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is submitting this application for Miami Leading Educator Advancement and Recognition through Networks of Support (Miami LEARNS) as a Local Educational Agency under Absolute Priority 1, Human Capital Management Systems (HCMS) or Performance Based Compensation Systems (PBCS) and Absolute Priority 2, High-Need Schools, and Competitive Preference Priority 1, Spurring Investment in Qualified Opportunity Zones.

Introduction. M-DCPS, the nation’s fourth-largest school district, is challenged with providing a world-class, twenty-first century education for a vibrantly diverse population of more than 350,000 students who strive every day to overcome challenges presented by poverty (69% free or reduced-price lunch eligible) and minority status (93% minority) to succeed and thrive in the global workplace. The district’s strategic plan is built on a singular goal – student achievement. It is M-DCPS’ moral imperative to ensure that every student in every school has access to rigorous, relevant, and effective instruction every day, no exceptions, no excuses (Fullan & Quinn, 2015).

Despite the district-wide closure of schools spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, M-DCPS rapidly pivoted to online learning, deploying tens of thousands of electronic devices for teachers and students, scaling up online professional development (PD), and working with community partners to ensure wireless connectivity support for learning across the district. Despite the geographic dispersion of more than 350,000 students over 2,400 square miles, from beachfront penthouses to migrant labor camps, M-DCPS was uniquely poised for this switch to online learning as a result of four years of implementation of its Digital Convergence initiative, a systemic restructuring of the learning environment dedicated to leveling the digital divide. M-DCPS’ priority in technology acquisition and deployment has consistently focused on the classroom,
rather than central office supports. Currently, M-DCPS’ human capital management systems (HCMS) operate on a patchwork of legacy, mainframe applications, some long out of support, vendor platforms, and locally-developed applications, hosted in-house. There is little to no connectivity across platforms, with some key data residing on vendors’ external applications or on individual M-DCPS staff computers, impacting accessibility to data needed for HCMS decision-making and stakeholder support.

The proposed project, Miami LEARNS, will address the challenges associated with a cohesive HCMS and a performance-based compensation system (PBCS) that incentivizes administrative and instructional personnel at high need schools located within or near designated qualified opportunity zones. Miami LEARNS will support 50 administrators, 1,123 teachers and 16,834 students in the targeted 18 schools by building capacity in teacher leadership, instructional effectiveness, and collaboration, enhancing a PBCS, credentialing diverse teacher leadership roles, providing differentiated, targeted, and job-embedded PD, and building collaborative communities of practice (COP) in the 18 participating schools. (Please refer to Appendix D for detail on selected schools.)

A: NEED FOR PROJECT

The overarching goal for Miami LEARNS is to increase student achievement and close the achievement gap in high-need schools by ensuring access to highly effective teachers and school leaders through the implementation of a cohesive and effective HCMS, including a PBCS that supports HCMS decision-making and that recruits, recognizes, develops, supports, and compensates instructional and leadership excellence. M-DCPS identified four critical needs to be addressed through the project: 1) Improve the digital backbone of the HCMS to create a more seamless integration of all aspects of the HCMS and support more effective Human Capital
Management (HCM) decision-making; 2) Improve the PBCS to provide multiple pathways for differentiated compensation and redefining career growth paths for classroom-based teacher leadership, and leverage the PBCS to increase implementation of research-based drivers of teacher effectiveness and student achievement in high-need schools in or near opportunity zones; 3) Safeguard the fairness, validity, and reliability of the educator evaluation systems on which the district’s PBCS decisions are based, and; 4) Improve students’ equitable access to excellent educators in high-need schools in or near opportunity zones.

The M-DCPS HCMS provides the basis and mechanisms for the district’s human capital actions and decisions, from pre-service support for teacher and leadership preparation at partner Institutions of Higher Education, to recruitment, hiring, onboarding, placement, retention, dismissal, PD, promotion, personnel performance evaluation, and compensation, including the PBCS. All HCMS functions for administrative, instructional and non-instructional personnel operate under the cabinet-level Chief Human Capital Officer position. The HCMS encompasses the critical digital backbone infrastructures that guide and supports HCM’s decision making and actions including policies and procedures instituted to address statutory and regulatory requirements and the HCM staff needed to fulfill related required actions.

The existing M-DCPS PBCS includes differentiated pay for teachers and school leaders. Florida Statute 1012.22 requires annual performance evaluations and performance-based pay for educators. (Please see Appendix H). The M-DCPS teachers’ contract includes a grandfathered salary schedule and a PBCS. Increases for teachers are performance-based, with Highly Effective ratings resulting in greater increases than Effective ratings, and no increases for ratings below Effective. The School Principal Differentiated Compensation Model awards principals a base salary and then factors in supplements based on the difficulty of the school assignment, resulting
in a school-linked differentiated dollar value. Pay increases are differentiated by performance, with increases for *Effective* administrators capped at 50% and 75% for *Highly Effective* administrators.

**Miami LEARNS** will build on existing processes and apply lessons learned through the gap analysis findings to effect needed improvements in the HCMS and the PBCS.

*A. i. The extent to which specific gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities have been identified and will be addressed by the proposed project, including the nature and magnitude of those gaps or weaknesses.*

M-DCPS has identified four gaps to be addressed through **Miami LEARNS**. First, gaps and weaknesses in the existing HCMS and PBCS services were identified. Second, M-DCPS has identified a lack of defined and transparently communicated pathways for professional growth and advancement through career ladders and career lattices with differentiated preparation in credentialing, and compensation opportunities aligned to a clearly communicated PBCS. Third, M-DCPS has identified potential challenges to the fidelity of the teacher evaluation system on which HCMS and PBCS decisions are based, and the need to safeguard these systems through ongoing training and recalibration. And fourth, M-DCPS has identified gaps and weaknesses in the equitable access to excellent educators of students in high-need schools.

**Gap/Weakness 1: Align and Improve HCMS and PBCS.** Gaps in the existing HCMS and PBCS services include lack of connectivity across systems; barriers to timely access to data needed for HCMS decision-making; barriers to information access and responsiveness of HCMS systems to meet the needs of internal and external stakeholders; the need to create a more seamless, user-friendly experience with the HCMS for all stakeholders; and the need to tighten up the connectivity of the learning link connecting observation, evaluation and PD recommendations. Historically, the M-DCPS HCMS has benefited from a legacy of best practices tested over time in
different regulatory and statutory environments and implemented through various federal, state, and local funding streams. These include implementation of Race to the Top (RTTT), Teacher Incentive Fund, and School Leadership Program initiatives. M-DCPS has implemented programs and initiatives that address: teacher recruitment and retention; new teacher induction and support; school-based, targeted professional learning; peer assistance and review; teacher driven observation (TDO); teacher leader development, monthly principal and assistant principal PD, the aspiring school leadership candidate identification and preparation program, and sustained induction programs for principals and assistant principals. Data management systems have also been put in place and tested over the years, starting with student information, personnel, and payroll reporting systems housed on mainframes that date back decades. Under Florida’s RTTT, M-DCPS undertook redevelopment of the Local Instructional Improvement Systems (LIIS) to link student and teacher data for accountability reporting and calculation of the value-added measures for educator evaluation. These student and school data systems are accessible through a secure web portal. Educators can access their students’ current data to identify student learning needs and areas for their own professional growth. Principals’ data dashboards provide them with current information on student and school metrics.

In stark contrast to the district’s technology-rich classroom environment and school and student data accessibility, parallel infrastructure support has not been available for HCMS information management systems. Data extraction and reporting is cumbersome, lacks connectivity, and impedes ready access to the data required for effective and agile HCMS decisions and resource allocation. M-DCPS identified a critical need to improve system connectivity and communication to support HCMS decision-making and to create information dashboards to address the needs of stakeholders, front-line staff, and senior management. A preliminary needs
assessment conducted with HCM staff and stakeholders exposed the vulnerability and potential fragility of the digital backbone on which HCM functions rely. Examples of some of the more critical fragmentation points are listed below, in relation to their impact on critical Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSL)-defined HCMS functions (except tenure, which is not attainable in M-DCPS) and district-identified HCMS needs. A more detailed summary of the initial needs assessment and identified gaps can be found in Appendix E.

- **Preparation**: There is no readily accessible database for principals’ to pull a report or maintain a real-time database that identifies who from their staff have fulfilled the Clinical Educator training for supervising teacher preparation students during field experience courses or internships without individually looking up a teacher in the SDES mainframe system.

- **Recruitment**: This relies on different external vendor applications depending on the position, with no single access point for instructional, administrative, and non-instructional openings. Applicants need to apply for each position individually. Applications are not mobile-device friendly, and lack internal communication and reporting tools. Advertising options are limited. Visibility for internal candidates is limited, restricting the candidate pool.

- **Hiring**: Multiple platforms are also involved, depending on the position. Contact points/internal communication tools are lacking.

- **Placement**: Other than position control tracking functions for payroll, these functions are very limited. Placements and applications are handled manually.

- **Retention**: The system currently lacks any systemic reporting of retention, such as within same school, within same position, across positions but within district, etc. These data must be extracted manually.

- **Dismissal**: Done manually, no systemic tracking available.
• **Compensation:** The financial and reporting structures do not currently differentiate by type of performance pay, as it is all reported in a single category, which is the same as is used for professional development stipends. Separating out by funding structure and purpose requires manual tracking and verification by staff.

• **Professional Development:** The PD management and tracking system (PDMS) in use does not export raw data to the M-DCPS systems. Data extraction is via pre-set and custom reports. Data are periodically transmitted by M-DCPS to the state for certification requirements via a mainframe system that is out of maintenance. PDMS and the M-DCPS internal HRInfo system that houses performance evaluations do not interface.

• **Promotion:** Internal applicants for a position have to follow the recruitment and hiring paths above or engage in a paper-based application process for the internal leadership candidate preparation programs. Documentation of promotions is completed manually.

• **Creating a More Seamless Learning Link Connecting Observation, Performance Evaluation, and PD:** The learning link between observations, evaluation, and PD is currently accomplished through recommendations that are manually input by supervisors into the evaluation system, while employees then manually search for and register for appropriate PD on the PDMS. All PD offerings on the PDMS are tagged and searchable by standards, but the search is done by the employee, manually. The system does not automatically report back regarding completion of the required PD or trigger follow-up actions.

• **Differentiated Compensation and Performance Pay:** Some data are linked to the evaluation system housed in HRInfo system. Other compensation, such as PD stipends, grant-funded position supplements or differentiated compensations, etc., is tracked and reported by project staff.
- **Micro-credentialing, Badging, Pre-Qualification:** M-DCPS needs the ability to track existing pre-qualifications, such as the clinical educator training to supervise pre-service teachers, and to track and credential participants in district professional growth and leadership development programs, such as instructional coaches, teacher leaders developed through the M-DCPS Teacher LEADership Academy (developed in 2016-2017 to provide a framework to guide teacher leaders through a series of sustained professional learning experiences to build their andragogical, content, and leadership expertise), and aspiring administrators.

- **Certification:** Educator certifications are currently tracked through SAP, legacy systems, and internal reporting. Tracking is done manually and on paper. It is difficult to flag/track teachers in out-of-field placements that trigger timelines for attaining required certification and termination consequences for failure to do so. Lack of an out-of-field flag also makes it difficult to target appropriate support for teachers and could lead to FTE Audit exceptions. Tracking teachers participating in M-DCPS’ alternative certification program is also done manually by the program administrator.

- **Professional Development Credit History and Bankable Master Plan Points:** The professional development management system (PDMS) does not account for bankable Master Plan Points (MPP) or MPPs obtained during a prior certification cycle. Banked MPP points and credit histories are tracked separately on an old mainframe system.

- **Internal and External Reporting:** There is a need to improve data visibility, accessibility, and reporting functions across HCM functions and provide HCMS decision-makers and stakeholders with real-time, relevant data dashboards.

- **Mentor Credentialing and Assignment:** District induction programs for new teachers and administrators include mentoring by trained mentors. There is no readily available database or
flagging system to help administrators make appropriate mentor assignments.

- **Customer Experience:** There are no systemic checkpoints or services to gain input on customer experiences to improve services.

**Gap/Weakness 2: Improve PBCS.** Another gap that M-DCPS has identified is the lack of defined and well communicated pathways for professional growth and advancement through career ladders and career lattices with differentiated preparation in credentialing, and compensation opportunities aligned to a clearly communicated PBCS. M-DCPS has built a Professional Learning Support Team (PLST) structure at every school site consisting of a designated PD liaison, an assistant principal, and three teacher leaders. The PD Liaison at each school site is the only one who is compensated, in the amount of $515 annually, for assisting teachers in identifying relevant PD opportunities, and for proposing and managing the school-site professional learning sessions on the PDMS. Other team members are not compensated for their roles within the PLST. There is no specific training or credentialing requirement for these roles except for the training provided to PLST members participating in the M-DCPS Teacher LEADership Academy. Training is provided subsequent to appointment, not as a prerequisite, and does not require nor provide a common foundation for leading professional learning. PLST membership is inconsistent from year to year, with turnover occurring even within the school year, leading to gaps in school-site support for PD.

In addition to the need to expand career growth paths for classroom-based teacher leadership as described above, the existing district wide PBCS is unidimensional, based on highly effective performance evaluations that include a student growth measure. A historic problem with this state-defined model, since its inception, is the time lag between the work and the incentive. Teachers work all year, students are tested in the spring, student and school results are released over the
summer months, and teacher value-added measures are released the next school year. Thus, since the introduction of the high-stakes evaluations and value-added measures, teacher evaluations are being finalized, and incentives paid out, well into the following school year, creating a disconnect between the work and the incentive. Current PBCS structures also fail to incentivize learning or implementation of research-based practices that improve student outcomes, as they are aligned to outcomes alone, not the professional practices that can improve outcomes.

**Gap/Weakness 3: Safeguard Educator Evaluation.** Teacher evaluation systems must not only be designed from the start to be fair, valid, and reliable, particularly in high-stakes contexts, but, more importantly, they must remain so. M-DCPS has identified potential threats to the fidelity of the teacher evaluation system on which HCMS and PBCS decisions are based. Implementation fidelity of observation systems within evaluations requires attention to the selection and training of observers (Grissom & Youngs, 2016) and ongoing training and calibration to prevent scorer drift and ensure consistency (Bell et. al, 2014; Qi et al, 2018; Tong et al., 2019). M-DCPS’ evaluation system for teachers, Instructional Performance Evaluation and Growth System (IPEGS), was originally designed as a holistic, growth-focused system to support feedback conversation with the eight standards assessed separately and no overall rating (Stronge, 2010).

With the incorporation of high-stakes consequences for pay and job retention set by the Florida Student Success Act of 2011, M-DCPS identified an urgent need to improve assessor training on IPEGS to ensure the fairness and consistency of observations and ratings in teacher evaluation across the district. M-DCPS leveraged Teacher Incentive Fund grant support to develop observation and rating calibration training materials and train an initial cadre of principal master trainers. Beginning in 2014, this multi-day training was deployed for all principals and assistant principals through a combination of Title II, Part A, state, district, and foundation funding; it has
since been institutionalized as the annual Assessor Calibration and Feedback (ACF). As the ACF materials are secure assessments, they are vulnerable to over-exposure, so the limited available pool of these resources is being exhausted going into the seventh year of this work. There is a need to refresh the pool of calibration assessments to support ongoing training and make the most effective use of the resources already committed to this critical area of need.

**Gap/Weakness 4: Access to Excellent Educators.** A fourth area of critical need is to improve educator effectiveness in the identified high-need schools. Targeted high-need schools selected for Miami LEARNS are located in/near Qualified Opportunity Zones and are then ranked on percentage of students whose families are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch as well as schools’ English Language Arts proficiency and learning gain percentages for tested grades. In addition, schools represent geographic diversity throughout Miami-Dade County, and include all school configuration/grade levels (elementary, middle, K-8 and high school). Appendix D provides detailed school data. A National Council on Teacher Quality study on teacher distribution and student achievement in M-DCPS (Kumar & Waymack, 2014) highlighted persistent concerns. Despite significant improvements in district-wide student achievement, students in poverty and students of color were more likely to be in schools with more first-year teachers and greater teacher turnover, with significant implications for school culture and student outcomes. A study of Teach For America implementation in M-DCPS indicated that practices that foster a sense of community and support can influence teacher retention (Hansen, Backes, & Brady, 2016). While the high-performing teachers transferred in outperformed the teachers they replaced, the low-performing teachers continued to struggle in the new schools. Given the significant difficulties in recruitment for high-need schools, there exists the potential to leverage the expertise of teachers in formal or informal teacher leader roles, and high-performing teachers to extend their influence beyond their
own classroom walls.

A. ii. The extent to which the proposed project will integrate with or build on similar or related efforts to improve Relevant Outcomes using existing funding streams from other programs or policies supported by community, State, and Federal resources.

Integration with Similar or Related Efforts. Miami LEARNS builds on prior practice in school, PD, and compensation reform. M-DCPS has identified the critical need to improve the digital resources in the HCMS backbone which are currently financed through a range of funding streams supporting service agreements, licenses, contracts, and purchases, as well as district personnel. These current funding resources will continue to be allocated in support of HCMS services and programs and will be reassigned or realigned to the new systems and services. The resources are fully detailed in the Non-Federal Budget Narrative as sources of ongoing commitment and support for the work accomplished in the HCMS. The funds requested to support Miami LEARNS are a short-term infusion of much needed capital to replace and restructure systems that are failing, and to purchase and/or lease needed resources that will continue to be operated beyond grant sunsetting with existing resources.

Miami LEARNS builds on work accomplished through district participation in Race to the Top (RTTT) in developing the Local Instructional Improvement System, and improving the Professional Development Management System, which is now maintained through a combination of Title II, Part A and other funding streams. In addition, the proposed project builds on work accomplished through Title II, Part A support in the development of the state-approved Professional Learning Catalog and the work accomplished in developing, implementing, training, and supporting the Professional Learning Support Teams (PLSTs) at each school site.

Integration with FL Consolidated State Plan. Florida’s Plan to Ensure Equitable Access
to Excellent Educators (Florida Plan) focuses on ensuring comparable distributions of high-impact teachers across all school types, as well as across schools earning grades A to F on the state accountability system (please see Appendix J for FL Consolidated State Plan). Teacher effectiveness is a key factor affecting school quality and student outcomes, especially for disadvantaged students (Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey, & Woessmann, 2019). Florida’s Department of Education uses the value-added measures as the metric for determining teacher impact.

Like other high-poverty, high-minority urban districts, M-DCPS faces significant challenges in recruitment, retention, and equitable distribution of the most effective educators, with the highest-need schools generally experiencing higher levels of teacher turnover and less-experienced teachers and more out-of-field teachers. A number of strategies have been attempted in M-DCPS to improve teacher quality at challenging schools, with limited levels of success. These have included involuntary transfers, partnership with Teach For America, and incentive strategies. As is common, teacher turnover and reassignments continue to plague the most challenging schools, with consequences to student learning.

Teacher peer support and teacher leadership roles can help improve effectiveness and support retention of effective teachers. Teachers’ relationships with other teachers and with their school leaders are essential drivers of teacher mobility and retention decisions. The work of school reform and instructional improvement must be collaborative, with principals and faculty working together to build the school culture as a COP focused on student outcomes.

The Florida Plan includes strategies for convening highly effective educators to communicate about effective practices. Miami LEARNS will support the state plan by placing classroom-based teacher leaders with defined leadership roles and learning pathways to build COPs and support increased collective educator efficacy in the targeted schools. Further, Miami
LEARNs supports the Florida Plan to ensure equitable access to excellent educators through strategies designed to:

- implement effective models to motivate and incentivize high-performing teachers to work in and remain in the identified high-need schools and retain and recognize the highest-performing teachers (Hanushek, 2020);
- provide targeted, personalized, PD and support to teachers performing below the Effective level to improve performance (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016);
- provide opportunities and structures for teacher leadership so that high-performing teachers can coach, mentor, support, and provide targeted professional learning opportunities for other teachers to disseminate best instructional practices and support increased effectiveness (Berry, 2019); and
- provide opportunities for research-based models of peer collaborations such as teacher-driven observation, professional learning communities, and lesson study to foster the implementation of COPs focused on instructional excellence.

A. iii. The extent to which the proposed project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards for students.

The M-DCPS Strategic Plan has one central goal – improving student achievement. The strategies and resources put in place through Miami LEARNs will bridge identified systemic gaps that impact the all-out district effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards for all students. Under the leadership of Superintendent of Schools Alberto M. Carvalho, despite drastic funding cuts, radical legislative changes to teacher evaluation and compensation, and an exodus of experienced staff at all levels due to legislated changes in the retirement system, M-DCPS has posted gains in student achievement, particularly for minority
students, through a strategy of protecting the classroom at all costs. The brunt of the financial impact has been at district and administrative support levels, with administrative support staffing down to 40% of pre-recession levels. Despite the successes posted by the district as a whole, significant gaps remain in some of the highest-need schools. The tiered system of support provided by the state ESSA prioritizes the most academically fragile schools for intensive support, but leaves other schools with similar populations of minority students and student in poverty largely on their own. Miami LEARNS integrates with the state’s tiered support system by supporting these other schools.

Teacher quality is the single most important school-controllable factor impacting student achievement, with school leadership second. School leadership influences teacher morale and their perception of working conditions, teachers’ sense of efficacy, and impacts the schools’ ability to recruit and retain highly effective teachers, particularly in high-poverty, high-minority settings. The structure of peer-to-peer support embedded throughout Miami LEARNS is designed to enhance teacher quality and instructional effectiveness; foster teacher growth and retention; transfer teacher knowledge and expertise from classroom to classroom, from expert to novice, and from peer to peer; and reward highly effective teachers for teaching in high-need schools with the students who need them most.

A. iv. The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.

Miami LEARNS will address long-standing gaps in the HCMS data infrastructures and provide a basis for improvements in HCMS functions and decision-making. Through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, M-DCPS will identify and secure the resources and consultative support to carry out the migration of functions and increase data accessibility and visibility. The
realigned data management systems will support improvement of instructional and leadership practice through a tighter learning loop between observation, evaluations, student achievement data, and PD, leading to improvements in teaching and learning throughout the district. In the targeted high-need schools, M-DCPS will have the opportunity to pilot and test an improved model for supporting site-based, job-embedded, personalized PD and define and credential twenty-first century career ladder and career lattice positions for teacher leaders to lead from the classroom. This will serve to disseminate and extend the best practices from the most effective educators, while still keeping them in the classroom directly impacting student learning.

B. QUALITY OF THE PROJECT DESIGN

B. i. The extent to which the proposed project Demonstrates a Rationale.

Rationale. School districts, particularly very large districts, are highly complex systems with many and diverse inputs and drivers, but only one output that truly defines success – student achievement. The key questions that guide the work to be accomplished through Miami LEARNS are: 1) What are the critical success factors for an effective school district, one that drives student learning?; and 2) What are the systems, structures, and processes that need to be in alignment to ensure this success? Anderson and Young (2018a, b) reviewed a substantial body of literature on school district effectiveness to develop a research-based framework for understanding district effectiveness, which, “includes the presence of practices that promote the ability of a district to achieve the mission of delivering high quality and equitable educational experiences for each student. These practices have organized into three domains, (a) focusing on supporting and leading people who work in schools and districts, (b) structuring and managing the organization and its resources, and (c) developing and delivering a high-quality education.” (Anderson & Young, 2018b, p.1).
The researchers identified 13 overarching themes that emerged as drivers of district effectiveness, with levels of support from the literature characterized as strong, moderate, or weak. The four themes evidencing strong support are: Facilitate Infrastructure Alignment (65 sources, including 29 peer-reviewed journal articles); A District-wide Focus on Student Achievement (59 sources, including 31 peer-reviewed journal articles); Build and Maintain Good Communications and Relations, Learning Communities, and District Culture (59 sources, including 29 peer-reviewed journal articles); and Use Evidence for Planning, Organizational Learning, and Accountability (60 sources, including 22 peer-reviewed journal articles). Four themes evidencing moderate support are: Use Proven Approaches to Curriculum and Instruction; Interpret and Initiate Policy to Align with the Change Agenda; Implement PD for Teachers and Leaders; and Invest in Instructional Leadership Capacity. Of these eight drivers for district effectiveness, the design and implementation plans for Miami LEARNS directly address all four of those that evidence strong support and two of the four that evidence moderate support, while integrating with the district’s strategic plan and aligning with comprehensive efforts to improve administrative efficiencies, support excellence in teaching and learning, and increase student achievement.

In a large-scale quantitative study, Leithwood, Sun, and McCollough (2019) identified seven district characteristics as significant contributors to student achievement: Creating a broadly shared mission, vision and goals for students; Extent of alignment across and within the district; Coherent instructional program; Trusting relationships and collaborative peer structures; Evidence-based progress monitoring and decision-making; PD that is job-embedded, sustained, extensive, aligned to the district’s vision, and personalized; and Professional leadership development. Although differently labeled, these characteristics generally align to those identified by Anderson and Young (2018b) and are reflected in the design of Miami LEARNS, which
incorporates a two-pronged approach to improving district effectiveness in supporting student achievement, coupling district-wide realignment of the core structures and functions of the HCMS digital backbone to improve support for HCMS decisions and processes, and piloting the “leveling up” of the district’s PD learning structures and supports at high-need schools through a novel differentiated, role-based, and achievement-based PBCS.

The Theory of Action under which Miami LEARNS operates is founded on satisfaction of a sequence of necessary preconditions, as follows: Improving student achievement is the result of effective instruction and collective teacher efficacy (CTE) (Hattie, 2016). Effective instruction is the result of teachers’ high levels of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (Stronge, 2010, 2018) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993, 1997) while CTE is supported by teachers’ individual self-efficacy, collaborative practice, and supportive school leadership (Larsen, 2018). Necessary preconditions for the above include high-performing teachers and school leaders who are recruited, hired, placed, developed, supported, promoted, recognized, and compensated appropriately. Necessary preconditions for that are human capital management decisions and processes that provide the necessary support and structures. Necessary preconditions for the HCMS decisions are data systems that capture and report the data necessary for HCMS to support effective decision-making. These elements are connected through the logic model located in Appendix A: Logic Model.

Project Design in Response to Gap/Weakness 1: Align and Improve HCMS and PBCS. M-DCPS will leverage the resources made available through Miami LEARNS to, first, engage a consultant to conduct a deep guided study of all aspects of the HCMS in order to identify existing strengths for replication and extension and gaps and opportunities for improvement and realignment (Kirmizi, & Kocaoglu, 2020) and identify resources, including vendors of data
management solutions, to address the identified gaps and implement new, more efficient, effective, agile, and responsive data management systems to support HCMS decision-making. M-DCPS will then identify and employ implementation consultants to guide M-DCPS in the migration of critical data and functions to the new, integrated systems. M-DCPS will follow all required procurement processes in identifying and selecting the vendor, or combination of vendors and service providers, that will provide the district with the best solution with the greatest long-term viability and sustainability with district resources. Prior experience with systems migration, including development of the new Local Instructional Improvement System (LIIS) and the migration of enterprise functions to an SAP platform, bears out the need for experienced consultancy support in the development and integration of new systems, particularly those with as many interfaces and touchpoints, and as mission-critical for M-DCPS, as the HCMS.

*Figure 1. Coherent HCMS Model*
**Project Design in Response to Gap/Weakness 2: Improve PBCS.** Through Miami LEARNS, M-DCPS will continue to align with the state requirements for performance pay while also applying differentiated compensation models to incentivize, near-term, a number of research-based actions that, individually and in conjunction, are research-based drivers of increased teacher effectiveness, increased teacher efficacy, and improved student outcomes. Incentivizing best practices, while retaining the evaluation-based incentives, will provide a mechanism to support growth as well as achievement, and to leverage teacher expertise and leadership beyond isolated classrooms, creating peer-to-peer networks of support.

The PBCS implemented through Miami LEARNS will provide multiple pathways for differentiated compensation, create career growth paths and credentialing. M-DCPS will pilot the Miami LEARNS PBCS in the participating 18 high-need schools in or near opportunity zones providing for differentiated compensation based on additional roles and responsibilities, skills acquisition and credentialing, teacher leadership roles, evidence of professional achievement and mastery of content knowledge, and superior teaching and leadership skills, in order to foster school communities of practice, strengthen collective educator efficacy, and improve student achievement.

**Project Design in Response to Gap/Weakness 3: Safeguard Educator Evaluation.** Miami LEARNS will support the addition of updated, current materials and resources to support and align with the district-wide annual Assessor Calibration and Feedback (ACF) and the need to ensure accurate and consistent communication about all elements of the evaluation system and performance-based compensation. By refreshing the pool of calibration assessments, the district will be able to support ongoing training and make the most effective use of the resources already committed to this critical area of need.
Project Design in Response to Gap/Weakness 4: Access to Excellent Educators. 

Miami LEARNS will support the 50 administrators, 1,123 teachers and 16,834 students in the targeted 18 schools by building capacity in teacher leadership, instructional effectiveness, and collaboration. This “grow-your-own” model of teacher leadership and job-embedded learning, across a cohort of 18 high-need schools, will provide an immediate and sustained benefit to the 18 schools and provide a lasting benefit, district-wide, in defining new models of teacher leadership and school-based peer collaboration and support, differentiating and credentialing teacher leadership roles, and testing new models of differentiated compensation in a PBCS, aligned to improve instructional practice and increase student achievement.

Miami LEARNS will build on M-DCPS experience in fostering teacher leadership by selectively developing and credentialing teacher leaders in four clearly defined and compensated teacher leadership and peer support roles. As described earlier, M-DCPS has built a Professional Learning Support Team (PLST) structure at every school site consisting of a designated PD liaison, an assistant principal, and three teacher leaders. Miami LEARNS will strengthen the targeted, job-aligned professional development supports to improve educator effectiveness by leveraging and improving the PLST model through clarification and communication of career ladder and career lattice roles and opportunities and a PBCS aligned to those roles.

A review of ongoing continuous improvement practices for the PLST model revealed a need for increased professionalization and expertise of the school site teams through differentiated, role-based PD and support to PLST members according to their areas of responsibility and team roles. This led to the development of the year-long Teacher LEADership Academy in 2016-2017. The focus of the M-DCPS TLA is to provide a framework to guide teacher leaders through a series of sustained professional learning experiences to build their andragogical, content, and leadership
expertise in order that these teacher leaders can apply their skill for improvement of teaching and learning at their school site while leading from the classroom. (Concepcion, Fernandez, Goldfarb, & Gonzalez, 2020). The four learning pathways developed for participants in the M-DCPS TLA inform the Miami LEARNS PLST model.

PLSTs at the target high-need schools will be redesigned, formalized, and compensated for four classroom-based teacher leadership roles at each participating school sites. These new roles include: New and Early Career Teacher Leader to support the growth and retention of early career teachers and provide support to teachers assigned to teach out-of-field; Professional Learning and Growth Leader to support professional collaboration, peer observation, and professional learning; Digital Innovation Leader to accelerate the transition to the twenty-first century digital learning models; and Framework of Effective Instruction Leader (Instructional Coach/Content Expert) to support, model, and coach for improved instructional effectiveness aligned to the research-based standards in the evaluation system.

Miami LEARNS will strengthen the targeted, job-aligned professional development supports to improve educator effectiveness by leveraging and improving the PLST model through clarification and communication of career ladder and career lattice roles and opportunities and a PBCS aligned to those roles. PLSTs at the target high-need schools will be compensated for serving on their school’s PLST. Candidates aspiring to these classroom-based teacher leadership roles will participate in a teacher leadership foundational course that will address the top 10 training needs for teacher leaders as identified by Gordon, Jacobs, and Solis (2014). They include: (a) the development of interpersonal skills; (b) coordination skills to facilitate the organizing of people, resources, programs, and activities; (c) knowledge of curriculum and instructional innovations; (d) mentoring; (e) group processes; (f) use of technology; (g) facilitating change; (h)
training and coaching; (i) leading reflective inquiry; and (j) addressing diversity. This shared foundation will then be followed by an intensive, role-specific credentialing process for candidates aspiring to each of the teacher leadership roles. School leaders will also participate in foundational skill-building on building collaborative cultures, engaging in Communities of Practice (COP), and supporting CTE.

CTE is the self-perception that teachers in a school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities and is the single most powerful factor affecting student academic achievement, with positive effects that overcome negative effects of poverty. CTE is associated with higher levels of teacher engagement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019) and increased individual teacher efficacy (Hoy, Sweetland & Smith, 2002). Peer relationships are essential in developing collective efficacy for all teachers, but especially novice teachers (Larsen, 2018). Supportive school leadership that makes room for teacher leadership and collaborative learning structures is critical, as these structures, such as professional learning communities, are linked to increased teacher efficacy and student achievement.

CTE influences student achievement through the communication of positive expectations and beliefs about students’ ability to learn; these are communicated through patterns of positive affirming behaviors, such as: receptivity to PD (Rauf, Ali, Aluwi, & Noor, 2012); deeper implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies (Cantrell & Callaway, 2008; Parks, Solmon, & Lee, 2007); strong academic focus (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002); and disciplinary actions for student misbehavior that avoid suspension or removal from classrooms (Gibbs & Powell, 2011). These behaviors reflect teachers’ efficacy beliefs. The theory of action is such that teachers’ beliefs influence their actions toward students, and teachers’ actions, in turn, influence students’ sense of efficacy. Teacher efficacy development and student achievement operate as
reciprocal drivers, as success builds the belief in being successful (Hoogsteen, 2020).

**Miami LEARNS** supports each of these research-based practices for improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement. The professional learning experiences, instructional coaching, and Teacher-Driven Observation that are supported through release time, PD stipends, and incentives, provide a foundation for teachers to model successful practice and learn directly from the successes of peers in a collaborative culture of professional support. **Miami LEARNS** provides support for collaborative and community-building experiences and peer-to-peer connections in a COP (Breen, 2015; Li et al. 2009).

This shared foundation will then be followed by an intensive, role-specific credentialing process for candidates aspiring to each of these teacher leadership positions to prepare them for twenty-first century school leadership that is rigorous, responsive, relational, and inclusive (Killion & Harrison, 2006; Knight, 2007; Nappi, 2014). Each of these teacher leader positions, four per school, will carry additional compensation of $3,000 per year for the additional responsibilities. The implementation of a common foundation for teacher leadership preparation and the role-specific preparation and assignment of each of the classroom-based teacher leaders in each school-site PLST will ensure that these leaders are prepared to identify and address the individual and school-wide professional learning needs and connect teachers and administrators with targeted, individualized, and relevant professional learning opportunities to create forums for collegial and collaborative conversations about instructional practice leading to greater collective teacher efficacy and instructional effectiveness, and increased student achievement.

Substitute and release time will be provided for the PLST members and for participating teachers to engage in peer observations, collaborative practice, and modeling and coaching during the school day, while professional development stipends will support the implementation of
professional learning outside of the contractual workday. In a study on principal perceptions of high-stakes teacher evaluation, principals expressed support for incorporating peer observation and feedback to improve teacher effectiveness (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016a).

Principals will also have the opportunity to participate in professional learning on leading for collaborative practice, and supporting teacher leadership, fostering communities of practice and building collective efficacy. M-DCPS will develop a micro-credentialing process for these teacher leaders. This will, over the course of implementation of Miami LEARNS, strengthen the quality of PD for educators throughout the district by cascading the lessons learned and leveraging the micro-credentialing resources developed through Miami LEARNS to recruit, develop, and deploy professional learning leaders for schools throughout the district.

Miami LEARNS will implement a formative feedback and peer-to-peer support system to leverage the teacher leaders in the PLSTs to increase reflective practice and professional effectiveness. Through Miami LEARNS, M-DCPS will test new differentiated compensation models, including bonus pay, that include a PBCS that incorporates measures of student learning and that reflect employment responsibilities and success of teachers and school leaders in high-need schools, provide recognition for successful fulfillment of additional responsibilities or job function, including defined teacher leadership roles, and evidence of professional achievement and mastery of content knowledge and superior teaching and leadership skills addressing defined areas of need.

B. ii. The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress towards achieving intended outcomes.

M-DCPS will contract with an external evaluator to conduct a comprehensive evaluation that will render formative feedback and provide summative evaluation reports on Miami
**LEARNS.** Every three years, the School Board issues an RFP to develop a pre-approved pool of qualified evaluation consultants to provide evaluation plans and research designs, collect data, analyze data, interpret results and prepare recommendations and reports. In March 2020, the proposed new pool of evaluation consultants (that had responded to an RFP issued in December 2019) was scheduled to go to the School Board for review and approval at the March 18, 2020 School Board meeting.

With the closure of all M-DCPS schools effective March 13, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the March School Board meeting was cancelled as time was needed to transition the meetings to a virtual platform accessible by the entire Miami-Dade County community. The proposed pool of evaluation consultant was subsequently approved on May 20, 2020 which did not allow sufficient time to follow procurement policy to identify the external evaluator for this grant application (due on June 2, 2020). Funds to cover the cost of an external evaluator have been included in the budget based on the district’s experience with external evaluators on past federal grants. Upon notification of grant award, M-DCPS will put out a call for bids for evaluation implementation, following all required procurement procedures.

The selected evaluator will use implementation science frameworks as a guide to the evaluation process. Monitoring implementation will allow for the opportunity to inform all areas of the program regarding the efficacy of processes, procedures, fidelity, and implementation progress, and can be used for continuous program refinement. The model is predicated on the belief that the success of M-DCPS’ HCMS is dependent upon strong leadership, organization, and competency drivers, which are fully supported through the proposed program components described in this application. The evaluation will measure and monitor progress towards the goals and project measures of Miami LEARNS by including methodologies and data collection
activities that assess key components of the program’s logic model, including the development of key implementation drivers. The inputs, activities, and outputs of the logic model are clearly related to the program’s objectives and serve to focus attention on the achievement of the overall results of Miami LEARNS.

In evaluating the implementation, progress, and outcomes of Miami LEARNS, M-DCPS will implement a mixed-methods evaluation (Bowen, Rose, & Pillkington, 2017; Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006) to provide formative feedback for continuous improvement of the implementation and generate periodic formative and summative evaluation reports on Miami LEARNS. The district will use a Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) model designed to elicit information on context, inputs, process, and product (Stuffelbeam & Shinkfield, 2007). CIPP is a stakeholder-sensitive approach which focuses on improvement and can address one or more of the following: content, input, process, or product, or all can be implemented, through the different phases of a complex and multi-stage project such as Miami LEARNS.

For Miami LEARNS, the core value system reflected in the program goal and objectives is clearly aligned to the M-DCPS strategic plan, mission, vision, and core values, which are centered on improving outcomes for students by aligning and improving the level of support provided to students and schools. The Miami LEARNS goal and project-specific objectives are as follows:

- **Miami LEARNS Project Goal:** Increase student achievement and close the achievement gap in high-need schools located in or near designated opportunity zones by ensuring access to highly effective teachers and school leaders through the implementation of a cohesive and effective HCMS that recognizes, develops, supports, and compensates instructional and leadership excellence.
- **Project Objective 1:** Improve and expand current core components of the HCMS through improved alignment, integration, and efficiency to better inform HCM and PBCS decisions. *(Districtwide Benefit; Addresses Absolute Priority 1)*

- **Project Objective 2:** Enhance the effectiveness of use of teacher and school leader performance evaluation results to inform key school and district level Human Capital and Performance-Based Compensation decisions. *(Districtwide Benefit; Addresses Absolute Priority 1)*

- **Project Objective 3:** Increase student academic achievement in targeted high-need schools *(Addresses Absolute Priority 2)*

- **Project Objective 4:** Increase the percent of teachers and school leaders in high-need schools performing at a highly effective level. *(Addresses Absolute Priority 2)*

- **Project Objective 5:** Increase educator effectiveness in targeted high-need schools through development and credentialing of career ladder and career lattice teacher leadership roles, targeted professional learning, and differentiated compensation *(Part of the required PBCS in Absolute Priority 1)*

The **Miami LEARNS** mixed methods evaluation will incorporate multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data, including quantitative data generated through district and state assessments, stakeholder surveys, and process metrics relating to timely attainment of project milestones, as well as unobtrusive passive data capture of HCMS data backbone utilization, and efficiency metrics naturally generated by system users (Webb, Campbell, Swartz, & Sechrest, 1973). This will support data triangulation and confirmation of findings across multiple data sources, and counter potential sources of bias.

School-level effects will be evaluated through a quasi-experimental assessment of the
school-facing components of Miami LEARNS in a matched comparison group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Cook & Campbell, 1979; Greene, 2007; Stufflebeam, 2001) capturing naturally generated data resulting as artifacts of the implementation, district and state assessment, and accountability system and educator evaluation systems. The evaluator will analyze and report formative and summative findings to address project-specific objectives as well as those required for reporting under the established TSL program performance measures.

The evaluation methodology will be grounded in sound design principles including (a) triangulation of data, (b) mixed methods, (c) multiple data sources, (d) rigorous analytical strategies, and (e) frequent reporting. Given that Miami LEARNS encompasses both systemic reforms to the HCMS, with district-wide impacts, and school-site deployment of re-defined, credentialed, and compensated teacher leader roles on the PLST, the evaluation approach will be two-pronged. Evaluation of the realignment of the HCMS will focus on an implementation evaluation, addressing timeliness and thoroughness of implementation, timely attainment of fiscal, programmatic, and utilization milestones, in an explanatory mixed methods approach (Colton & Covert, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, 2012). The school supports and PBCS aspects of Miami LEARNS will be evaluated via a mixed methods approach, including quantitative measurement of student achievement, in a matched comparison group quasi-experimental design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Cook & Campbell, 1979; Mark & Watson, 2011).

C. QUALITY OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Placement in the Organization. Miami LEARNS is intentionally designed to be cross-functional to address the systemic gaps that cut across HCMS functions from pre-service teacher support to senior district leadership. Miami LEARNS’ management plan connects functions of PD, leadership development, evaluation and evaluator training, compensation, recruitment and
retention, and human capital management data systems.

Miami LEARNS will be organizationally situated in the Office of Human Capital Management under the direction of the district’s Chief Human Capital Officer, Mr. Jose L. Dotres. Given the extensive and integrative work to be accomplished through Miami LEARNS with regard to the HCMS, the project will reside within HCM, under the supervision of Dr. Tricia Fernandez, Assistant Superintendent, Talent Management and Development, who reports directly to the Chief Human Capital Officer. Dr. Fernandez’ team consists of 5 Administrative Directors, 3 District Directors, 4 Executive Directors, and their respective staff members who will be instrumental in supporting project implementation. Her staff will work closely with their HCM counterparts in Labor Relations and Compensation, Professional Standards and Employee Support Services, and Human Resources Information Services to support the project’s goal and objectives. The complete HCM organization chart can be found in Appendix B.

The leadership team in HCM has extensive experience in managing large projects and coordinating efforts across funding streams and across departments, ensuring that timelines are met, milestones accomplished, and deliverables realized on time and in budget, including experience with multiple federal grant programs funded through the Teacher Incentive Fund, Race to the Top-District, and Title II, Part A. Resumes for current M-DCPS staff members who will have responsibility for the grant are included in Appendix B; their time and effort are part of the required non-federal match for the grant.

Day-to-day management of the project will be coordinated by the Miami LEARNS Project Director (100% time & effort, grant funded) who will report to an administrative director on Dr. Fernandez’ team. The Project Director will coordinate with the District Director, Human Capital Management, to ensure systemic alignment across all HCM departments bridging the functions of
Human Resources and Professional Development and Evaluation. The Project Director’s responsibilities include but are not limited to: fiscal and implementation oversight, providing vision and leadership for the project; ensuring communication across district departments, region offices and school sites; participating in Advisory Council meetings, and managing project support staff including the HCMS Digital Alignment Supervisor. Professional Learning Leaders will report to staff in the Office of Professional Development and Evaluation (OPDE) who oversee the PLSTs and the Project Director to ensure alignment of support across all schools and sustainability of the project.

The Human Capital Management Digital Alignment Supervisor (100% time & effort; grant funded) will report to the Project Director and work with staff across Human Capital Management, Information Technology, Instructional Technology, partners, and vendors to determine systemic gaps and misalignments and ensure that systems and processes are integrated, workflows are effective and efficient, and stakeholder requirements are addressed. The professional in this position will lead the technology integration, communication, and outreach efforts regarding the HCMS digital backbone, including outward-facing social media communication.

Additional grant-funded project staff members include the Miami LEARNS Professional Learning Leaders positions who will support the following teacher leader specialist roles at the 18 schools: New and Early Career Teacher Leader, Framework of Effective Instruction Leader (instructional coach/content expert), Professional Learning and Growth Leaders, and Digital Innovation Leader. (2 Professional Learning Leaders will be assigned to each of the 4 specialist roles for a total of 8 positions, 100% time and effort, grant funded.) The Professional Learning Leaders will report to the Project Director and staff in the OPDE who oversee the PLSTs to provide direct support to the participating schools in their functional area and collaborate with
OPDE staff on the annual training sessions provided to all PLSTs to ensure alignment of support across all schools and sustainability of the project. This team of specialists will work primarily with the school-based teacher leaders in their area of focus, but will also work collaboratively and cross-functionally to support their schools as needed. Please see Appendix B for Professional Learning Leader job description.

**Advisory Committee.** To assist with project oversight and ensure ongoing communication between key internal and external stakeholders and project staff, a **Miami LEARNS** Advisory Committee will be convened with representation from: local institutions of higher education; Human Capital Management, Labor Relations; Assessment, Research, and Data Analysis; District/School Operations; Region administration; principals and teachers from participating schools; and the teachers’ labor organization, United Teachers of Dade (UTD); national organizations such as The New Teacher Center and/or National Institute for School Leadership. The Advisory Committee will meet twice a year to monitor project implementation.

A management plan timeline detailing responsibilities, timelines, milestones, and resource coordination is provided in Appendix F.

**D. ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES**

**D. i. The likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement.**

**Leverage Support.** M-DCPS will leverage the financial resources provided through **Miami LEARNS** and the local matching commitment to effect systemic improvements in the viability and responsiveness of the HCMS data systems that support HCMS decisions district-wide. In a system the size of M-DCPS, this type of reform cannot be accomplished all at once. Rather, the reforms and improvements put in place through **Miami LEARNS** will dovetail with processes and systems already put in place to improve and streamline business operations and
financial management and those made to the Local Instructional Improvement System (LIIS). HCMS is at the intersection between financial resources and school operations, charged with recruiting, placing, retaining, rewarding, recognizing, developing, and promoting the most talented and effective employees for every position in the most resource-efficient and effective way. **Miami LEARNS** builds on a body of prior work in this area and will, in turn, support ongoing work across the district that is being accomplished through multiple resource streams.

State funding. Through the District Instructional Leadership and Faculty Development Grant (2014 – present), M-DCPS has supported successive teacher leadership initiatives, including the Professional Learning Support Teams (PLSTs) and three cohorts of the M-DCPS TLA. The state provides these funds to support PD for principals and other LEA administrators in instructional and human resource leadership positions focused on the use of teacher evaluations to improve instruction, alignment of instruction with the LEA’s curriculum and state standards, best financial practices, and other leadership responsibilities that support student achievement through job-embedded professional development provided through regional, local, and/or digital formats. Each year, activities supported through this funding source add to the experience base and has supported additional refinements to district initiatives.

Federal Funding. M-DCPS has implemented Teacher Incentive Fund (the successor to the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program) projects in cohorts 2, 3, and 4, each testing different TIF-aligned models of incentives and performance-based compensation and professional learning support systems for teachers and administrators (Miller et al., 2015). Through these implementations, M-DCPS has acquired significant institutional memory and experience in identifying district needs, developing strategies that fit the M-DCPS context, and leveraging time-limited funding resources to build tools to effect lasting systemic changes.
Result in system change. As evidenced by the district’s past success in leveraging local, state and federal funds and managing grant programs, the proposed project has been designed to result in systemic change. Specifically, through a strategic alignment of resources, including Miami LEARNS, the district will:

- increase the clarity of communication at all access points for external and internal candidates about entry, career ladder, and career lattice requirements, and preparation and advancement opportunities;
- expand teacher leadership preparation opportunities;
- define and credential four twenty-first century classroom-based teacher leadership positions;
- review and realign current compensation models for teacher leadership positions and roles;
- implement a more robust system for connecting educators with personalized, targeted, relevant, and rigorous professional learning opportunities as a result of data emerging from observations and evaluations;
- improve instructional effectiveness and retention of early-career and out-of-field teachers;
- increase the reliability and validity of the observation processes and evaluation systems for educators;
- improve the effectiveness of instructional leaders through job-embedded professional learning and support; and
- support the fidelity of implementation of research-based best practices to improve instructional effectiveness and student learning outcomes at high-need schools.

D. ii. The extent to which the proposed project is likely to build local capacity to provide, improve, or expand services that address the needs of the target population.

Through Miami LEARNS, M-DCPS builds on a history of teacher leadership
development, including through prior TIF grants and district initiatives, including the PLSTs and the M-DCPS TLA. As one example, the TIF 4 grant brought the Teacher Driven Observation (TDO) and Assessor Calibration and Feedback (ACF) models into M-DCPS, and both have been deployed district-wide; the TDO through training provided to the PLSTs and professional development sessions offered to interested teachers across the district; and the ACF through master trainers and annual training for all school leaders.

The implementation of three cohorts of TLA has provided a pool of teacher leaders located at school sites who have been identified as ready to take the next step in teacher leadership through Miami LEARNS. As more teacher leaders participate in the district’s TLA, with a new cohort each year, more schools will be ready to move into this deeper level of implementation. Through piloting the Miami LEARNS PBCS model at these 18 schools, the district can test the effectiveness of the incentive models in increasing research-based best practices, increasing CTE, and improving student achievement. As these models are tested and proven, this provides a basis for discussion regarding existing PBCS models, supplemental compensation models, and the most effective allocation of resources going forward. The improvements and realignments to the HCMS digital backbone will address long-standing deficits and provide a sound foundation for HCMS decision-making and improvements for the future.

D. iii. The extent to which the applicant demonstrates that it has the resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant, including a multi-year financial and operating model, and accompanying plan; the demonstrated commitment of any partners; evidence of broad support from stakeholders (e.g., SEAs, teachers unions) critical to the project’s long-term success; or more than one of these types of evidence.

As the fourth-largest school district in the country, M-DCPS manages more than $330
Million of grant funding each year. M-DCPS has an extensive track record of leveraging soft funding opportunities to develop and test multiple solution pathways to address systemic needs, identifying and then institutionalizing the approaches that best fit the district’s unique context. As an example, district challenges in the identification and development of high-potential internal leadership candidates (Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011) were addressed through multiple funding sources, including private, state and federal funding. In anticipation of sun-setting of each of these funding streams, M-DCPS worked to identify, sustain, and extend the lessons learned and best practices from each program. As a result, M-DCPS institutionalized the district-funded leadership preparation BENCH program, which provides intensive support experiences for identified, high-potential candidates throughout teacher leadership roles and assistant principalships to create a pipeline from the classroom to the principal’s office, and the SCALED leadership development program which provides monthly full and half day sustained leadership development throughout the school year for approximately 1,000 current school and instructional leaders.

In terms of broad support for the proposed project, the district has collected input from stakeholders on activities and components related to Miami LEARNS. 27 teacher leaders from eight schools that participated in a perception survey related to the Teacher Leadership Academy were invited to participate in focus group interviews and 12,803 stakeholders responded to a survey related to TDO, job-embedded PD, and PLSTs. The results (shared in Appendix G) reveal support for the components of Miami LEARNS. Various external partners also support Miami LEARNS, as evidenced by the letters of support included in Appendix C.

United Teachers of Dade (UTD) is the exclusive bargaining agent for educators with Miami-Dade County Public Schools. UTD represents approximately 17,798 full-time instructional employees within M-DCPS, which includes classroom teachers and student services and
instructional support employees. For many years, representatives of UTD and district management personnel have collaborated on several performance-based compensation and evaluation initiatives and agreements, including three TIF grants, which demonstrate active union involvement through input, discussion, and concurrence in the design, planning, and implementation of the initiatives. District Labor Relations staff have participated in the design of the program, and upon notification of grant award, will work with UTD staff, elected officers, and representative school-site and district instructional employees to finalize the details of project implementation in accordance with contract language through a Letter of Understanding (LOU).

Please see Appendix I for a sample LOU.

**Competitive Preference Priority 1: Spurring Investment in Qualified Opportunity Zones**

Designated Qualified Opportunity Zones (QOZ) are designed to spur economic development and job creation in distressed communities such as the communities represented by the M-DCPS student population. Critical to revitalizing individual census tracts is investment in high-quality educational opportunities that will enhance quality of life. Educational attainment in QOZs is lower than the nation, with more adults in QOZs lacking a high school diploma than have a four-year college degree. Twenty-one percent of adults in the average QOZ lack a high school diploma, compared to 12% nationwide (Economic Innovation Group, 2020). M-DCPS will utilize Miami LEARNS to provide services in QOZs by focusing intervention efforts across 18 targeted schools. Sixteen of the selected schools are either directly located within QOZs or have attendance boundaries serving students directly located within QOZs, and two of the schools were included as they also serve high-need schools showing high rates of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and low English Language Arts achievements and learning gains. Appendix D details relevant school demographic data and provides the census tract numbers of the QOZs in which M-
DCPS proposes to provide services.

Recruitment and retention of culturally competent teachers is a priority for M-DCPS and there is a need to ensure that the cultural diversity of the district staff is responsive to the needs of the students and their families. Recruiting and retaining teachers that are skilled in intercultural communication can serve to enhance educational achievement outcomes in targeted QOZ schools. Districts face significant challenges in building a reflective and diverse workforce (Putnam, Hansen, Walsh, & Quintero, 2016). The M-DCPS teaching force is 19% Non-Hispanic White, 25.3% Non-Hispanic Black, 53.7% Hispanic, and 2.0% other. Administrative staff are 16% Non-Hispanic White, 30.3% Non-Hispanic Black, 52.6% Hispanic, and just over 1% other. Miami LEARNS can serve to address this need through implementation of the aligned HCMS, improving recruitment and retention efforts and providing equitable access to excellent teachers in high-need schools.

Data from the most recent educator evaluations indicate significant discrepancies between high-need schools and non-high need schools in the district, overall. Non-high need schools reported 53% of teachers as Highly Effective, and 45.5% Effective, while high-need schools district-wide were 34.8% Highly Effective and 45.5% Effective. For the 18 schools located within or adjacent to Qualified Opportunity Zones that were selected to participate in Miami LEARNS, teachers rated Highly Effective were 32.25% and 62.3% were rated Effective. The most recent evaluation data for principals and assistant principals indicate that in non-high-needs schools, 66.3% of principals and assistant principals, met criteria for Highly Effective, and 28.6 % were Effective. In high-need schools overall, 31% of administrators were Highly Effective and 63.3% were Effective. For the 18 Miami LEARNS schools, 25.8% of administrators were Highly Effective and 74.2% were Effective.
Beyond addressing this competitive priority by spurring investment in Qualified Opportunity Zones, Miami LEARNS will increase student access to highly effective educators, and provide pathways for professional recognition, credentialing, and differentiated compensation, including performance pay for increased student achievement, to educators in the designated high-need schools. Miami LEARNS will create a cohesive HCMS, provide an enhanced PBCS, differentiated and credentialed teacher leadership roles, differentiated, targeted, and job-embedded PD, and build collaborative communities of practice to enhance the shared culture of knowledge and expertise at the school site and, thus, increase the effectiveness and collective efficacy of educators to achieve the goal of increasing student achievement and closing the achievement gap in high-need schools.
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