# Table of Contents

A. Quality of the Project Design .................................................................................................................. 4

1) Exceptional Approach to the Priorities .................................................................................................. 4

2) Sufficient Quality, Intensity, and Duration ............................................................................................. 8

3) Address the Needs of the Target Population or Other Identified Needs ............................................... 17

4) Potential Incorporation of Project Purposes, Activities, or Benefits beyond the Grant .......... 19

B. Significance .............................................................................................................................................. 20

1) Magnitude of Results Likely to be attained by the Proposed Project ......................................................... 20

2) Contribution to Theory, Knowledge, and Practices .............................................................................. 25

3) Dissemination .......................................................................................................................................... 26

C. Quality of the Management Plan ............................................................................................................ 27

1) Measurable Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes ....................................................................................... 27

2) Management Plan Ensures Project is on Time and within Budget ......................................................... 29

3) Adequate Procedures for Ensuring Feedback and Continuous Improvement ........................................ 32

D. Quality of the Project Evaluation ............................................................................................................. 33

1) Evaluation will Produce Evidence that will meet the WWC Standards with Reservations .................. 34

2) Evaluation will provide Performance Feedback and Periodic Assessment of Progress ............ 38

3) Objective Performance Measures Clearly Related to the Intended Outcomes ................................. 40
Project Narrative

For this Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) proposal, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), University of South Carolina (UofSC), Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity (BranchED), and six local education agencies (LEAs) across the state of South Carolina, are seeking grant funding to form the collaborative South Carolina Principal Leadership Network (hereafter referred to as SCPLN). This dynamic partnership will address: Absolute Priority 2 (Supporting Effective Principals or Other School Leaders), Competitive Preference Priority 1 (Promoting STEM Education, with a particular Focus on Computer Science), Competitive Preference Priority 2 (Fostering Knowledge and Promoting the Development of Skills that Prepare Students to Be Informed Thoughtful and Productive Individuals and Citizens), and Competitive Preference Priority 3 (Spurring Investment in Qualified Opportunity Zones). SCPLN will serve 150 school leaders (principals and assistant principals) from 95 schools across six partnering LEAs: Orangeburg Consolidated School District Five, School District of Pickens County, Laurens County School District 55, Spartanburg County School District One, South Carolina Public Charter School District, and the schools affiliated with the Charter Institute at Erskine. This project will impact 58,385 students, 56% of whom live in poverty. Twelve partner schools are in qualified opportunity zones (see Tables H.1 and H.2 in Appendix H for details).

Superintendents and district leaders indicate that supporting effective school leaders is challenging with limited fiscal resources to provide leaders innovative job-embedded professional development and growth. District leaders face challenges in providing authentic opportunities for meaningful collaboration among principals, due to lack of administrative staff to cover for school leaders to engage in professional development or to visit and observe
effective school leaders in action. School leaders serving in traditionally underserved communities have the least access to professional learning, and several studies have found that those in small, rural schools report very little time spent in collaboration (Preston, 2011; Stewart & Matthews, 2015). Partner LEAs reported an average of one or two networking events per year and no facilitated opportunities to systematically support school leader development.

The combined partners listed above have designed SCPLN to address the professional development needs of school leaders in South Carolina. The goal of the two-year cohort-based program is to build and accelerate the leadership capacity of participating school leaders through high-quality virtual professional development, quarterly on-site coaching, and quarterly networking opportunities via virtual communities of practice (CoP). SCPLN will also provide specialized content training focused on increasing the quality and equity of access of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) learning opportunities and social and emotional learning (SEL) at participants’ schools. All partnering LEAs have expressed the marked need for enhancing both STEM and SEL programs (discussed further in the Section A3), consistent with a growing demand for these skills in the workplace (Belfield et al., 2015; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Jang, 2016).

Additionally, the South Carolina Department of Education’s (SCDOE) distinct Profile of a South Carolina Graduate highlights that all South Carolina graduates should have access to world class knowledge and skills, and life and career characteristics defined as integrity, self-direction, global perspective, perseverance, work ethic, and interpersonal skills, as well as depth in STEM standards (see Figure H.1 in Appendix H). By providing comprehensive, ongoing school leadership training, emphasizing the expansion of SEL and STEM programs in our partner schools, we can develop students who meet the goals set forth in the Profile. We expect
that, as a result of the program, SCPLN participants’ schools will have 1) increased school leader retention, 2) increased teacher retention, and 3) increased student achievement, particularly in STEM, compared with non-participating schools in South Carolina.

A. Quality of the Project Design

SCPLN is a job-embedded, evidence-based professional development system built around the exemplary NIET Principal Leadership Series, a virtual module-based training system that was created after 20 years of supporting the development of effective principals and other school leaders implementing comprehensive school improvement. This innovative and focused approach to school leader development integrates the following evidence-based practices for impactful leadership: (1) Creating and Communicating a Culture of Equity; (2) Leading Instructional Coherence; (3) Building Shared Instructional Leadership; and (4) Sustaining Reflective Practice through Continuous Improvement and Coaching. All SCPLN activities will take place during a two-year cohort-based program, which will include quarterly on-site job-embedded coaching and quarterly meetings with a community of practice, which are defined as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p.1). SCPLN will facilitate ongoing CoP to provide meaningful and relevant collaboration amongst participants to leverage the individual and collective experiences.

(1) Exceptional Approach to the Priorities

The proposed project represents an exceptional approach to Absolute Priority 2, Supporting Effective Principals or Other School Leaders, in that it creates a multi-faceted approach to cultivating excellence in leadership. SCPLN brings together two non-profits, NIET, a national leader in school improvement, leadership development and job-embedded professional
development, and BranchED, a leader in diversifying the educator workforce, with UofSC, a large and high-impact university that currently partners with 82% of school districts in South Carolina, including three of six partner LEAs (UofSC College of Education, 2019). Project partners bring unique strengths and expertise to design and implement network strategies, ensuring high-quality content and effective achievement of project goals (see Appendix H for SCPLN Logic Model, which includes key inputs, strategies, and outcomes).

The collaboration between project partners creates a unique approach to addressing equity challenges that schools face: NIET will provide training in leading a culture of equity, UofSC will support with training for creating equitable in opportunities for STEM education and BranchED will facilitate training in the development of SEL that integrates culturally relevant pedagogy for all students. SCPLN goes beyond content learning, however, by providing school leaders with a network of professionals in the state to collaborate with, as well as on-site coaching and an intimate CoP to share and reflect on experiences applying new knowledge and skills at respective school sites. The network aspect of SCPLN addresses the isolation that some principals, especially in rural areas where three of the partner LEAs are located, often feel as they seek to implement change. It also provides a defined mentoring relationship that extends beyond the state-mandated one-year program for new school administrators, allowing connections to be made between school leaders with various levels of experience, backgrounds, and training. The design of SCPLN keeps leaders in their schools as much as possible in that school leaders will receive virtual training, personalized on-site coaching, and support from peers all without leaving their buildings. This model, while conceived prior to COVID-19 challenges, ensures that SPCLN will continue even amidst these types of unforeseen obstacles.

**Absolute Priority 2: Supporting Effective Principals or Other School Leaders**
Research has suggested that the top two school-related variables impacting student achievement are the quality of teachers and the quality of the principal (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hallinger, 2011; McKibben, 2013; Papa, 2007; Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002; Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). Effective principals establish a school culture of high standards, trust, professional development, and supportive structures where both teachers and students continuously learn (Youngs & King, 2002). Conversely, ineffective principals and principal turnover create a school culture of day-to-day survival, frequent restarting of school improvement initiatives (as principals change), lack of consensus around high standards, and teacher cynicism (Peske & Haycock, 2006). In schools located in traditionally underserved communities, too often plagued by poor teacher quality and turnover, school leaders face a host of challenges, not least among them is creating an equitable, supportive environment for teachers and students to grow. Experienced and novice leaders alike may need support and further training to meet these challenges. SCPLN will support school leaders in developing impactful leadership capacities with evidence-based professional development to enhance instructional leadership, create a sustainable model for high-quality job-embedded professional development for school leaders, provide enhanced learning experiences in STEM, and cultivate a culture that fosters inclusion and advancement for all students. Upon completion of project activities, SCPLN school leaders will be eligible for a micro-credential through the collaboration with UofSC.

**Competitive Preference Priority 1 (CPPl): Promoting STEM Education, with a particular Focus on Computer Science**

SCPLN addresses CPPl through intentionally designed evidence-based professional development for school leaders. Network participants will receive specialized training and
individualized coaching to increase the instructional effectiveness of STEM educators in their schools, leading to improved STEM experiences for students. The first training, facilitated by NIET, will focus on *Building Instructional Coherence* and provide an enhanced understanding of how the new South Carolina Computer Science Standards align with traditional Science, Math and English/Language Arts instruction. The second training, an innovative, content-focused training led by UofSC faculty, will focus on implementing and enhancing Computer Science opportunities for all students. In the months following each training, NIET Leadership Coaches will provide individualized coaching sessions to support school leaders as they make efforts to improve the quality of STEM instruction at their schools. The synergy created by combining evidence-based professional development activities and associated on-site coaching will increase the intensity and rigor of support for leaders as they accelerate goals around increasing student interest and performance in STEM-related fields, particularly Computer Science.

**CPP2: Fostering Knowledge and Promoting the Development of Skills that Prepare Students to Be Informed Thoughtful and Productive Individuals and Citizens**

SCPLN will address CPP2 through evidenced-based professional development for school leaders. Network participants will receive specialized training and ongoing peer support for the implementation and intentional integration of enhanced SEL instruction at their schools. The first training, facilitated by NIET, will focus on *Creating and Communicating a Culture of Equity* The second training, an intensive content session on evidence-based practices in *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* led by BranchED, will increase knowledge and skills in inclusive instruction that prepares all students to be thoughtful and productive citizens. After these trainings, school leaders will have the opportunity to collaborate with network peers in facilitated on-going virtual CoP to share how they have implemented their training and reflect on its impacts at their site.
CPP3: Spurring Investment in Qualified Opportunity Zones

SCPLN will spur investment in qualified opportunity zones (QOZ). Five of the 6 participating LEAs have schools located within QOZ (see Appendix H, Table H.2 for the list of schools and their census tract numbers). The school leaders at QOZ schools will have the opportunity to collaborate with participants inside and outside the zones, opening up a network of shared knowledge and experience. Project partners are intentionally joining forces with the goal of increasing school leader and teacher retention, enhancing school culture, and maximizing learning experiences and outcomes for students, especially in STEM fields and Computer Science. These priorities are in response to needs noted by national education organizations like the Learning Policy Institute and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (e.g. Levin & Bradley, 2019), as well as partner LEAs (discussed further in the Section A3). SCPLN presents a comprehensive, integrated project to support effective school leaders, by providing participants with leadership skills to lead their sites through the challenging work of implementing enhanced STEM content and culturally relevant pedagogy to support the social and emotional development of all students.

The next section provides details for each component of the SCPLN project and outlines the three goals and supporting objectives that will guide the implementation and evaluation of this approach.

(2) Sufficient Quality, Intensity, and Duration

SCPLN is designed as a two-year program, with three cohorts of 50 participants each. Cohorts will overlap so as to provide as much programming as possible during the three-year grant, such that Cohort 1 will begin in Year 1 and finish in Year 2, Cohort 2 will begin in Year 2 and finish in Year 3, and Cohort 3 will begin in Year 3 and finish their second year after the
grant has ended. The first cohort will include school leaders from 24 schools in Pickens County and Orangeburg; subsequent cohorts will be selected in collaboration with partner LEAs based on school leader needs and program capacity to ensure adequate timing. The CoP will be created after the initial kick-off meeting for each cohort, with school leaders grouped according to years of experience, grade levels served on their campus and individual expressed interests and goals. During each quarter of the first year, participants will engage in professional development, on-site leadership coaching, and a virtual CoP that promotes continuous improvement and reflection. Participants will also attend two in-person events with specialized content trainings at the initial kick-off meeting and the NIET Annual Conference. In the second year, participants will continue to meet quarterly with their CoP to share ongoing challenges and progress as they grow through their participation in the program. Partner LEA principals along with at least one other school leader from their site will participate in the cohort together to promote a coherent and sustained vision within each school. SCPLN will use a combination of previously developed evidence based training materials and innovative new practices, ensuring that services are of ample quality, intensity, and duration to lead to the proposed changes in all stated outcomes (see Appendix H for the Logic Model).

Goal 1: Create new, sustainable Principal Leadership Networks for 150 school leaders serving in underserved communities over the duration of the grant [AP2.2; CPP3].

Through the creation of a sustainable Principal Leadership Network, NIET, UofSC, and BranchED will provide partnering LEAs with 120 hours of evidence-based professional development to support effective school leaders. Evidence-based professional development rooted in the local needs of school leaders, teachers and students, including those in QOZ, will allow participating school leaders to learn and apply impactful leadership skills with support
from a Leadership Coach and network peers in their CoP. The alignment of local needs with evidence-based practices for excellence in leadership provides a powerful tool for advancing school leaders’ leadership capacity, educator retention, school culture, and student outcomes.

To sustain the leadership advancements and implementation, each LEA will identify a District Lead that will oversee and participate in cohort activities. All leadership training sessions are virtual and will continue to be available for SCPLN partners upon the completion of the grant. Likewise, the identified District Lead will work in collaboration with NIET Leadership Coaches to learn the cycle of support embedded in on-site coaching and guiding effective CoP. The establishment of a District Lead will prepare each participating LEA to implement similar sustainable structures to support and develop school leaders in the future.

SCPLN will invite three cohorts of 50 school leaders over the duration of the grant to be part of the Principal Leadership Network (Objective 1.1). Each cohort of network school leaders and other school leaders will participate in the two-year intervention, as outlined in Table 1. Sixty-four of 120 total professional development hours will be led by NIET on proven practices in leadership to provide participants with the skills and knowledge necessary to lead change on their campus (discussed in the description of Goal 2 below), followed by an on-site leadership coaching visit for all participating school leaders. SCPLN will also provide network school leaders with quarterly opportunities for two years to engage in virtual CoP (Objective 1.2). The CoP topics and discussions will align participants’ school needs with the evidence-based professional development. To facilitate meaningful connections among members and provide sufficient time for engagement on a deeper and more personal level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Milestones (responsible party)</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Create new, sustainable Principal Leadership Networks for 150 school leaders serving in underserved communities over the duration of the grant [AP2.2; CPP3]</td>
<td>1.1 Invite three cohorts of 50 school leaders over the duration of the grant to be part of the Principal Leadership Network.</td>
<td>Identify participating school leaders (LEAs)</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify District Leads (LEAs)</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>May</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Form SCPLN Advisory Board (Project Director, LEAs, BranchED, UofSC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assign NIET Leadership Coaches to Participants (Project Director)</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 Day Kick-Off Meeting for Grant Staff and Participants (Project Director, BranchED, District Lead)</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Establish CoP small groups of 6-8 school leaders (Project Director, District Lead)</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assign NIET and BranchED Leadership Coaches to CoP (Project Director, BranchED)</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 1 - Virtual CoP (NIET Leadership Coaches, District Lead, BranchED)</td>
<td>Feb, May</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 2 - Virtual CoP (NIET Leadership Coaches, District Lead, BranchED)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Build instructional leadership capacity of school leaders</td>
<td>2.1 Provide network school leaders with 8 days of virtual high-quality professional</td>
<td>2-Day Training: <em>Creating and Communicating a Culture of Equity</em> (NIET Leadership Coaches)</td>
<td>Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-Day Training: <em>Leading Instructional Coherence</em> (NIET Leadership Coaches)</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. SCPLN Evidence-Based Professional Development Milestones
| Serving in underserved communities through quarterly virtual training and personalized on-site coaching to support effective leadership practices [AP2.2; CPP3] | 2-Day Training: *Building Shared Instructional Leadership* (NIET Leadership Coaches) | Sept | Feb | Feb |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2-Day Training: *Sustaining Reflective Practice* (NIET Leadership Coaches) | Nov | Apr | Apr |
| Coaching: *Creating and Communicating a Culture of Equity* (NIET Leadership Coaches) | Mar | Sept | Sept |
| Coaching: *Leading Instructional Coherence* (NIET Leadership Coaches) | May | Jan | Jan |
| Coaching: *Building Shared Instructional Leadership* (NIET Leadership Coaches) | Oct | Mar | Mar |
| Coaching: *Sustaining Reflective Practice* (NIET Leadership Coaches) | Dec | May | May |

| 3. Build the knowledge of school leaders serving in underserved communities in leading and strengthening rigorous programs to improve student outcomes [AP2.2; AP2.3; CPP1; CPP2; CPP3] | Project Kick Off: STEM Goal Setting (NIET Leadership Coaches) | Oct | June | June |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instructional Coherence: Observing and Coaching STEM Instruction (NIET Leadership Coaches) | Apr | Nov | Nov |
| Transformative STEM Instruction (UofSC) | Mar | Mar | Mar |

| 3.2 Provide network school leaders with training to lead and strengthen SEL programs to develop positive relationships among students. | Project Kick Off: SEL Goal Setting (NIET Leadership Coaches) | Oct | June | June |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Creating and Communicating a Culture of Equity: Equitable Access to SEL (NIET Leadership Coaches) | Dec | Aug | Aug |
| Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (BranchED) | Mar | Mar | Mar |

---

PR/Award # S423A200043
Page e31
Each CoP will consist of 8-10 members of the network cohort and will be co-facilitated by a NIET Leadership Coach and BranchED Subject Matter Expert and UofSC. The CoP sessions will provide network school leaders with structured time to reflect and collaborate with peers experiencing similar challenges in their school settings. Meeting times will be scheduled to allow sufficient opportunity for participants to apply new learning from trainings and to address any additional challenges that have arisen after site visits. Participating District Leads will also participate in the planning and implementation of the CoP to ensure sustainability beyond the duration of the grant. Leaders from the same school will participate in different CoP to widen their professional network.

**Goal 2: Build instructional leadership capacity of school leaders serving in underserved communities through quarterly virtual training and personalized on-site coaching to support effective leadership practices [AP2.2; CPP3].**

The cornerstone of school improvement is the ability of school leaders to lead staff and stakeholders in establishing a school culture of high standards, trust, professional development, and supportive structures where both teachers and students continuously learn (Youngs & King, 2002). During Year 1 of cohort membership, SCPLN will provide network school leaders with 8 days of virtual high-quality professional development in effective leadership practices using the **NIET Principal Leadership Series (Objective 2.1).** NIET’s established Principal Leadership Series supports school leaders in growing their capacity and is based on the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (formally known as the ISLLC Standards), which are research-based competencies aligned with South Carolina’s school leader evaluation. The series is focused on four critical attributes for effective leadership, with two days devoted to each topic:

1. **Creating and Communicating a Culture of Equity;**
2. **Leading Instructional**
Coherence; (3) Building Shared Instructional Leadership; and (4) Sustaining Reflective Practice through Continuous Improvement and Coaching.

Each session drives a cycle of learning, application and implementation of evidence-based professional development for school leaders. Collectively, the sessions promote essential mindsets and skills that empower school leaders to build a school culture that prioritizes advancing instructional practices and improving outcomes for all students. Following each quarterly two-day virtual training, each participating school leader will have a coaching support visit. During Year 1 of cohort membership, NIET Leadership Coaches will provide network school leaders with 4 days of personalized, on-site coaching to support the application of effective leadership practices (Objective 2.2). The coaching support from NIET’s Leadership Coaches will be grounded in participants’ school site needs and the application of training topics with a particular emphasis on STEM and SEL on each campus. For example, after completing the session on Creating and Communicating a Culture of Equity, NIET Leadership Coaches may work with school leaders on the current state of equity of access to STEM courses at their respective schools. Individualized on-site coaching will enable participants to master new learning through authentic practice and application. NIET Leadership Coaches will support school leaders in applying new learning, aligned to their local needs, activities or challenges in their schools.

NIET has used the structure of intensive trainings and follow-up visits in previous partnerships and found that participants appreciate dedicated time to engage in the material, with personalized follow-up services to help them apply their learning. NIET Leadership Coaches are skilled at utilizing site visits to efficiently and effectively address school-based challenges participants may face and provide personalized feedback for school leaders. These coaches have
extensive experience in scaffolding learning so school leaders can effectively implement changes and innovations in their schools. Leader coaching begins with establishing a strong relationship built on trust and a common vision for addressing the individualized needs on each campus. School leaders will set school-based goals at the inception of the project; grounded in SCPLN project goals and aligned to specific needs of their teachers and students. During the on-site coaching visits, the District Lead, NIET Leadership Coach, and school leaders will assess progress towards these goals using classroom learning walks and student and teacher data. Participants will continue these quarterly assessments of progress after the first year, with the structure provided by NIET Leadership Coach and the support of the District Lead and their peers in CoP.

**Goal 3: Build the knowledge of school leaders serving in underserved communities in leading and strengthening rigorous programs to improve student outcomes [AP2.2; AP2.3; CPP1; CPP2; CPP3].**

School leaders serving in underserved communities often lack the support, resources and training necessary to build high-quality instructional opportunities for students. SCPLN will provide network school leaders with training to lead and strengthen STEM programs to improve student achievement (Objective 3.1). Each participating school leader will attend content training on implementing and enhancing student experiences in STEM, with an emphasis on Computer Science and the new South Carolina Computer Science Standards. Drs. Hengtao Tang and Suzy Hardie from UofSC College of Education will provide participants with intensive training on implementing and strengthening STEM courses to increase equity of access to STEM content in schools. This training will leverage Transformative Learning Theory (King, 2002; Mezirow, 2000) to create opportunities for school leaders to critically reflect on current
dilemmas regarding STEM education and exploring alternative STEM models to overcome obstacles in STEM education in their schools. Participants will be encouraged to share their experiences to establish an enriched collective knowledge base for the session.

In addition to supporting principals with STEM content training, SCPLN will provide network school leaders with training to lead and strengthen SEL programs to develop positive relationships among students (Objective 3.2). Embedding an intentional approach to equity in SEL programs is a timely need across the nation as the current pandemic has created new uncharted challenges in every community. The experts from BranchED will provide school leaders with comprehensive training in Leading Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in schools to foster knowledge and promote the development of skills that prepare students to be informed, thoughtful and productive individuals. BranchED will utilize their quality framework and expertise in creating a culture of excellence and equity to provide direct professional learning and follow-up support for school leaders in the CoP. These opportunities will support leaders’ development of their competencies in making the work of equitable engagement visible in their school buildings. BranchED will teach and support school leaders in leading culturally relevant engagement strategies that communicate to students that their family identities are understood and valued. They will also work with the school leaders to help them lead these strategies with teachers. By braiding BranchED’s approaches to achieving academic quality and equity, school leaders will create welcoming and inclusive school environments for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Such environments further efforts to minimize or remove barriers to learning and support the success of all learners, while ensuring that academic standards are not diminished. Studies have identified culturally responsive school leaders as those who emphasize high expectations for student academic achievement, exhibit an ethic of
care or “empowerment through care,” and maintain a commitment and connection to the larger community (e.g., Reitzig & Patterson, 1998; Scheurich, 1998; Johnson, 2006; 2007). The training provided by BranchED aims to support leaders’ development of their competencies in articulating who their students are, recognizing which voices are over/underrepresented or missing, and making the work of equitable engagement visible in their school buildings.

In bringing in partners with specific expertise for these critically important topics, SCPLN ensures quality content is of immediate benefit to school leaders. The focused subject-specific sessions will provide intensive content learning and concrete examples of ways for school leaders to improve instructional quality and school culture.

(3) Address the Needs of the Target Population or Other Identified Needs

The SCPLN project design will successfully address the individual needs of the school leaders in our partner districts because it begins where the leaders start, and accelerates improvement through intensive group learning in target areas, individual coaching, and ongoing CoP engagement across leaders with different experience levels and individually expressed needs.

First, the experience levels of school leaders in our partner LEAs are highly variable, with the average years of experience ranging from 4 to 20 years for principals and from 2 to 18 years for assistant principals. Some partner LEAs anticipate their veteran leaders to retire soon and believe that participation in the SCPLN will help them build a pipeline of effective school leaders and a network of support for these new leaders. Including both experienced and novice school leaders in the SCPLN will also provide the learning and reinforcement of skills for all and the sharing of valuable knowledge from veteran leaders to those new in the field. SCPLN will address participants’ needs to increase their leadership capacity so that they can be more
effective and remain in the schools that are most in need of high-quality leaders. Among the key skills that NIET Leadership Coaches will support in this project are school leaders’ ability to analyze their school data to identify specific teacher and student needs, and to create structures and protocols that direct resources to teachers and students with the greatest need. For example, school leaders who are skilled at observation and analysis of classroom practice can identify their most effective teachers and target them to the highest-need students. School leaders skilled at providing feedback on instructional practice, and in creating structures that empower teacher leaders to provide this feedback to other teachers, can better support teachers with the greatest need for improvement. The proposed project will help school leaders to identify and address issues of equity and create strategies to support students with the greatest needs for improvement. Individual coaching will lead to improvements in school leaders’ practice, and their retention will, in turn, impact students over many years.

Second, SCPLN will focus on intensive group learning in target areas where they have an acute and identified need - SEL and STEM. While many of the schools in our partner LEAs have initiated some sort of SEL training for leaders and teachers, only one of the six partner LEAs indicated that school leaders had participated in professional development focused on STEM and Computer Science, and this was only at the high school level. SCPLN represents a unique opportunity for partner LEAs to take part in systematic programming to build participants leadership skills and knowledge as they apply to the implementation of SEL and STEM initiatives.

Finally, very few of our partner LEAs indicated that their school leaders participate in any organized networking outside their district, with attendance at one-off conferences as the primary avenue for networking. The relationships among participants established through the
larger network of peers encountered in-person trainings and the smaller, more intimate CoP will help to sustain lessons learned during the training and provide school leaders with peers to turn to when facing challenges in the years after the grant ends. Further, the CoP will help foster relationships among all participants, regardless of experience.

By focusing on areas of critical need like STEM and SEL and creating a network of professional colleagues across the state, SCPLN will help school leaders to build their school leadership capacity, with the intended effects of increasing the retention of effective educators, improving school culture, and empowering students to attain higher achievement results. These results can have rippling effects in schools’ communities, as students are better prepared for college and careers following graduation, with some of the largest impacts possible in QOZ.

(4) Potential Incorporation of Project Purposes, Activities, or Benefits beyond the Grant

SCPLN will provide activities and support that will strengthen school leaders’ abilities and act as a continual resource in the relationships established through cohort and CoP membership. The project design encourages reflection and shared problem-solving through the CoP with network peers. Additionally, each LEA will have a District Lead who will shadow NIET Leadership Coaches during on-site visits to learn evidenced-based practices in coaching school leaders for continued follow up after the grant period. These efforts can naturally extend to other district schools that did not participate in SCPLN. These designated District Leads will also participate in CoP to learn how to facilitate impactful collaboration and to improve their understanding of the challenges school leaders face in their district and across the state. Partner LEAs will have ongoing access to the leadership training modules to use with future school leaders in the years to come.
The SCPLN sustainability plan includes elements that will ensure the long-term sustainability and success of this project, through building capacity at the school and district level, providing ongoing training and support, and by establishing professional relationships among school leaders that might not otherwise be realized due to geographic and scheduling limitations. We will encourage participation from principal and an additional school leader from within the same school to ensure a coherent vision through shared leadership and that systems and skills implemented through these professional development activities are maintained after the grant ends if a participant does not remain in her school. Increasing a school leader’s capacity to meet the instructional needs of their teachers more effectively will increase the likelihood of teachers feeling supported, an essential factor in teacher retention. We expect increases in teacher retention to be maintained as school leaders continue to hone the skills they learned during SCPLN participation in the years following the grant.

B. Significance

(1) Magnitude of Results Likely to be attained by the Proposed Project

The proposed SCPLN project will result in improvement in leadership capacity of school leaders in South Carolina, targeting underserved communities, which will lead to improvements in educator quality and retention, school culture, and student achievement. SCPLN has three goals: (1) statewide collaboration of school leaders through structured CoP, (2) support for school leaders through high-quality, virtual training and individualized on-site visits, and (3) focused support for school leaders on STEM and SEL. By increasing the leadership capacity of school leaders and providing a strong, sustainable network of support, the SCPLN will have cascading benefits: (1) more stable school leadership with less turnover, (2) more effective instruction and enhanced school culture because of improvements in how principals lead and
support teachers, and (3) increased student achievement because of the overall revamped school environment.

NIET is uniquely positioned to implement this project because of our experience empowering school leaders to make real and sustainable change in their schools, with empirical results of how our training, Leadership Coaches, and individualized services support schools in meeting their goals. This includes prior work supporting several LEA partners in the proposed SCPLN when they transitioned to new South Carolina teacher evaluation measures, as well as customized support for leaders of schools that had been performing in the bottom tenth percentile statewide. One of these partners, principal Hayward Jean of Mellichamp Elementary in Orangeburg, South Carolina, had this to say about his school’s partnership with NIET:

...initial conversations weren’t about students as data, but how our instructional systems and practices align with the shared vision for our scholars. The conversations were centered on highlighting the best practices of our faculty and staff, and we developed a plan together with our entire school community to build our capacity and sustain a culture of continuous improvement. ...For me, the opportunity to walk with NIET specialists in and out of classrooms, and discuss the areas of reinforcement and refinement was empowering. (NIET, 2020, p. 16)

This project will transform instruction and culture for the 95 partnering schools and their 58,385 students (over 56% in poverty) as well as establish a model that can support school leaders and LEAs across the nation.

Educational leadership research consistently documents that school leaders are second only to teachers as the most important school-based factor influencing student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Hallinger, 2011; McKibben, 2013; Papa, 2007; Papa et al., 2002;
Rampey et al., 2009). High-poverty, low-achieving school districts, which arguably need the best principals, have difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality applicants (Branch et al., 2012; Gates et al., 2006; Miller, 2013; Rangel, 2018), and principals in these schools may lack sufficient training (e.g., skills for coaching teachers to improve instruction, using data to target areas for improvement) to meet the demands. The average tenure of principals nationally was four years in 2016-17, with an 18% turnover rate (Goldring & Taie, 2018; see also Fuller & Young, 2009). In a recent study by UofSC researchers of six anonymous South Carolina public school districts, the average tenure of high school principals was 4.5 years, and that the average cost of replacing a high school principal in South Carolina was $24,000 (Tran, McCormick, & Nguyen, 2018). There are further costs to principal turnover, including higher teacher turnover (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Miller, 2013), which in turn results in poorer student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013), and effects of principal turnover can last up to five years (Miller, 2013). Together, these results suggest that students in low-income communities may be hardest hit when principals lack supportive resources to lead effectively.

Like other schools in South Carolina, our partner LEAs face challenges with (1) school leader and teacher turnover, (2) chronic absenteeism, and (3) low student achievement. For example, according to data from the 2019 South Carolina School Report Cards, in both Laurens 55 and Pickens County School Districts, the majority of principals have been at their school for fewer than five years. In each of these districts, more than 10% of students are chronically absent, average teacher retention is 79%, and average passing rates for state math and science assessments are below 60%. Sixty percent of the 16,000 students in Pickens and 73% of the 5,700 students in Laurens schools live in poverty. Like the students at many of our partner LEAs, these students need strong school leaders who will remain in their schools long enough to
implement lasting changes in instructional quality and school culture. We now review the evidence that high-quality professional development for school leaders can achieve the intended outcomes for participants’ schools.

More stable schools with less educator turnover. Research suggests that high-quality training and support for school leaders, such as that provided in the SCPLN project, increases the likelihood that principals will remain in their schools (Edwards et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2018). Most relevant and compelling for this proposal, a randomized controlled trial study found that schools providing school leaders with evidence-based leadership training and professional development had higher principal retention (Jacob et al., 2015) than schools with standard district-provided professional development. Increased confidence in their principal’s ability to lead may increase the likelihood of teachers to remain in their school. One of the contributing factors to a teacher’s decision to stay in the profession is the amount of support they receive from administrators and colleagues (Ingersoll & May, 2012). In a policy report by the Learning Policy Institute, Sutcher and colleagues (2016) wrote that, “Administrative support is the factor most consistently associated with teachers’ decisions to stay or leave a school” (p. 4). By improving the ability of school leaders to support their teachers, the SCPLN will positively impact teacher retention.

Improved instruction and school culture. According to a study by Sebastian, Allensworth, and Huang (2016), “Fostering a strong school climate through teacher leadership appears to be the key mediating mechanism through which leadership is related to student achievement” (p. 93). Using teacher and student surveys and student performance on state assessments from thousands of students in Chicago Public Schools over several years, Sebastian and colleagues studied different pathway models for how principal leadership affected student
achievement. They found the most evidence for a model in which teacher leaders were engaged in making policy decisions on the school learning climate, with empowerment from the school leader. Principals who encouraged teacher leadership also had successful school reforms in a study of six schools by Johnson et al. (2014). By strengthening the leadership skills of school leaders, the SCPLN will strengthen the instructional capacity of the entire school.

**Increased student achievement.** Research supports what school leaders know intuitively: student attendance and teacher quality are both strongly correlated with student achievement, especially for students from low-income backgrounds (student attendance: Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; Gershenson, Jacknowitz, & Brannegan, 2017; Gottfried, 2014; teacher quality: Chamberlain, 2013; Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014; Gershenson, 2016; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). By changing school culture through targeted training, on-site support, and a network of collaboration for school leaders, the SCPLN will increase student achievement.

NIET has successfully demonstrated its ability to train school leaders across the country in establishing impactful systems and structures to include instructional coherence, job-embedded professional development, a culture of reflection and student-centered instruction. NIET’s extensive work with LEAs has provided NIET Leadership Coaches with a comprehensive understanding of how to support effective school leaders. When fully implemented, SCPLN will have a positive impact on students, teachers and school leaders in the project across the partnering LEAs, and will benefit future students beyond the grant years from the increased effectiveness and improved retention of school leaders and teachers. Benefits will be sustained through the designation of District Lead as school leader support through the implementation of this project. The SCPLN will serve as a model that can be employed in
collaboration with any consortium of school leaders across the nation, with replicable trainings and support procedures.

(2) Contribution to Theory, Knowledge, and Practices

The SCPLN project will contribute to theories, knowledge, and practices of implementing successful professional development for school leaders that can improve leadership skills in meaningful ways that impact educator retention, student achievement, and school culture. Specifically, the proposed project will contribute to theories of school leadership through its rigorous evaluation plan. The project evaluation is designed to meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Standards with reservations on the efficacy of a cohort-based principal leadership network, using rigorous methods to create well-matched samples of non-participating school leaders for statistical comparison. Our analyses will reveal whether and to what extent this program design of combined virtual and in-person training, coaching, and networking for school leaders will improve leadership practice, which will in turn impact educator retention and student achievement. Section D provides further detail for the ways in which we will rigorously test our hypotheses.

Among the professional development programs that have been shown to be effective, the evidence is clear that two strategies, coaching and collaborative learning teams, can improve educator quality when delivered under the right conditions (Koh & Neuman, 2009; Swan & Dixon, 2006). While there is evidence that peer networking and support for school leaders can change school culture and student achievement (Intrator & Scribner, 2008; Marland, 2010), there are few models for large-scale (multi-district or state-wide) implementation. The SCPLN will contribute to the body of knowledge by providing one such large-scale model, with an iterative cohort design to capitalize on the most effective aspects each year of the grant. By the end of the
three years, partners will have considerable knowledge about how to best deliver professional development with networking components to participants across multiple districts.

The SCPLN project will contribute to practice in the field in providing evidence-based professional development to increase school leaders’ skills and knowledge for effective leadership. Focused training on leading STEM Computer Science and SEL provided by specialized partners will allow school leaders to make bold changes in school programming in areas where it is most needed. Distributed days of on-site support and coaching will ensure the transfer of knowledge to practice. Training multiple school leaders from the same school and district ensures that there is a pipeline of talent within districts as well as a culture of shared leadership within schools.

NIET will also share project findings with states and districts across the United States, as well as with institutes of higher education. This broad dissemination strategy has the potential to contribute to the theory and knowledge of leadership training for school leaders as well as the practice of training leaders through job-embedded, cohort-based programs. NIET has sustained numerous state and multi-district partnerships, many federally funded, which have shifted knowledge and practice for principals and teachers in schools across America. NIET has the internal capacity and experience to advance school leadership in South Carolina in the SCPLN project (see Table 3 for Key Personnel and Appendix B for their resumes).

**(3) Dissemination**

NIET has extensive experience disseminating the results of successful initiatives and will commit to sharing SCPLN findings at the local, state, and national levels through in-person presentations, academic conferences and journals, and print and online media. At the local level, NIET and partner LEAs will establish quarterly communications to monitor progress, ensure
implementation is on track and address any challenges they may be facing, and to share the results of the SCPLN program. NIET will also annually convene an Advisory Board that includes NIET’s President (or designee), Project Director, Leadership Coaches; BranchED Subject Matter Experts; UofSC faculty; the superintendent (or designee) from each LEA; and school leader and teacher representatives to provide a consistent platform for systematic review of the status and improvement of the program. Additionally, NIET’s Communications team will work with partner LEAs to promote schools’ success in local newspapers and media. At the state level, information about project implementation and findings will be shared with SCPLN districts and community stakeholders by presentations in partnership with UofSC and the SCDOE. We will also seek opportunities to present with partners at regional conferences and workshops such as the Equity in Education Conference hosted by UofSC. Finally, at the national level, the project results will be presented at the annual NIET National Conference and at least two other professional research conferences (e.g. AERA; AACTE). We have also taken the opportunity in the past to present our most promising findings to policymakers in Washington, D.C., in efforts to impact education reform on a national scale. These efforts have included testimony at Congressional Hearings, meetings with policymakers and legislators, and partnerships with other educator quality advocates. Findings will also be disseminated via NIET publications including research briefs, reports, and newsletters posted on our website and publicized in social media, and in appropriate professional journals.

C. Quality of the Management Plan

1. Measurable Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes

SCPLN goals are to increase educator retention and student outcomes by supporting school leaders in their efforts to improve instructional practices. Table 2 details how these
outcomes will be achieved through project goals and objectives. Performance measures show the
data that will be collected to assess the quality of implementation and project outcomes, and the
evaluation methods provide an overview of the assessment process. The evaluation team will
monitor progress on participation and completion of each project component.

**Table 2. Project Goals, Performance Measures, and Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 1: Create new, sustainable Principal Leadership Networks for 150 school leaders serving in underserved communities over the duration of the grant.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Measures</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Number and demographic data of school leaders in the SCPLN program (“participants” from here forward) by cohort (gender, race, ethnicity, education background, school demographic) [Objective 1.1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Percentage of participants who participate in each program activity (virtual trainings, on-site support, and CoP [CoP]) by cohort [1.1; 1.2; 2.1; 2.2; 3.1; 3.2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (1) Number, (2) Frequency, and (3) topics of CoP meetings offered by cohort [1.2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Number of hours of CoP meetings attended by each participant by cohort [1.2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Percentage of participants in annual surveys, focus groups, and/or interviews who report satisfaction with opportunities to network and collaborate with other participants [1.2]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcome:** Increase networking opportunities among school leaders serving in underserved communities in South Carolina to collaborate and share effective leadership practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 2: Build instructional leadership capacity of school leaders serving in underserved communities through quarterly virtual training and personalized on-site coaching to support effective leadership practices.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Measures</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (1) Frequency, (2) types (synchronous and asynchronous sessions), and (3) total number of hours of virtual leadership training provided by cohort [2.1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Percentage of participants who improve their performance (as measured by the state principal evaluation instrument Program for Assisting, Developing &amp; Evaluating Principal Performance (PADEPP), as well as by Learning Walks and Coaching sessions) [2.1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Percentage of teachers in participating schools who report increased confidence in participants’ leadership skills in annual focus groups/surveys for each grant year [2.1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Percentage of participants who remain in their current position for the two-year intervention (detailed in Section D, Research Question 1) [2.1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Percentage of teachers retained at participants’ schools for the two-year intervention (detailed in Section D, Research Question 2) [2.1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (1) Frequency, (2) types, and (3) total number of hours of on-site coaching by cohort [2.2]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcomes:** Increase (1) leadership capacity of school leaders, (2) retention of school leaders, and (3) retention of teachers serving in underserved communities in South Carolina.
Goal 3: Build the knowledge of school leaders serving in underserved communities in leading and strengthening rigorous programs to improve student outcomes [AP2.2; AP2.3; CPP1; CPP2; CPP3].

### Performance Measures

- Number of hours of STEM training provided by cohort [3.1]
- Percentage of participants who received UofSC micro-credentials [3.1]
- Number of national/state industry STEM credentials awarded to students at each participant’s school for each grant year [3.1]
- Percentage of students passing SC PASS Science and SC Ready Math (elementary and middle school) or End of Course Biology and Algebra (high school) at each participant’s school for each grant year (detailed in Section D, Research Question 3) [3.1]
- Math subject growth scores (grades 4-8) for each participant’s school for each grant year [3.1]
- Number of STEM/Computer Science courses or enrichment experiences per school [3.1]
- The percentage of students either awarded a STEM credential or took Computer Science courses (for middle school and high school students only) [3.1]
- Percentage of participants reporting increased confidence in their ability to lead and strengthen STEM programs in focus groups/surveys for each grant year [3.1]
- Number of hours of SEL training provided by cohort [3.2]
- Percentage of students/teachers reporting satisfaction with school culture in focus groups/surveys for each grant year [3.2]
- Student chronic absenteeism rate for participants’ schools each grant year [3.2]
- Percentage of participants reporting increased confidence in their ability to lead and strengthen programs to develop positive relationships among students in focus groups/surveys for each grant year [3.2]

### Outcomes:

Improve (1) student performance on STEM subjects, (2) school leaders’ ability to lead and improve the quality and rigor of STEM and/or Computer Science and SEL programs, and (3) improve school climate.

(2) Management Plan Ensures Project is on Time and within Budget

The SCPLN project team has the capacity to manage this project to ensure the intervention is implemented efficiently and effectively. The SCPLN project management plan includes key personnel to manage all components of the project and ensure that all objectives of the SCPLN will be executed on time and within budget. The Project Director will oversee progress of grant implementation, while each member of the project team will carry out clearly defined responsibilities aligned to the timeline and milestone of the grant tasks.
Each member of the project team fills a distinct area of expertise with aligned responsibilities. The project team will meet regularly during start-up and on a quarterly basis to track progress and implementation. The project director and members of the research team will have formal bi-weekly meetings for the duration of the grant to ensure accurate data collection and review implementation plans. The Project Director will hold bi-weekly virtual meetings with content specialists, District Leads, and Leadership Coaches to discuss project implementation.

**Table 3, Project Key Personnel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Personnel</th>
<th>Qualifications, Duties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escalation (in kind)</td>
<td>Will serve as an escalation point for any issues that arise in oversight of this grant, as well as work with senior NIET staff and district partner leadership teams to ensure effective implementation and project goals are met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator (0.05)</td>
<td>Has extensive experience working with Federally funded projects, including projects with the U.S. Department of Education. <strong>He will serve as principal investigator with oversight for grant implementation, budget and research.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCPLN Project Director (1 FTE)</td>
<td>Has experience managing federal grants, working with multiple districts, and a strong expertise in advancing school leadership teams and student achievement. <strong>She will (1) oversee and manage all aspects of the initiative; (2) coordinate communication between all stakeholders; (3) train and oversee Leadership Coaches; and (4) ensure project milestones are met.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Coaches (2 FTE)</td>
<td>Have multiple years of experience of successfully supporting school leaders in traditionally underserved schools. <strong>SCPLN Leadership Coaches will (1) support partner schools through training and coaching and (2) work closely with the Project Director to ensure strong program implementation. (3) Collaborate with BranchED Subject Matter Experts and UofSC Faculty Leads to facilitate CoP.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
is experienced in data collection and analysis and in disseminating findings from large-scale interventions. will (1) work with the Project Director and partners to ensure proper data collection; and (2) analyze and prepare data for submission of performance reports and wide-scale dissemination of findings.

is experienced in managing state and federal grants. For this project, will work with the Project Director and Director of Research to ensure all fiscal milestones are met.

### Contributing Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter Expert (contractual)</td>
<td>[Name]</td>
<td>Has held education leadership roles including at the South Carolina Dept of Education, along with is the SEL and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy subject matter expert for this project. Together they will co-design and co-deliver the professional development sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter Expert (contractual)</td>
<td>[Name]</td>
<td>Has experience leading organizations and initiatives that provide ongoing academic and support services for all students to increase graduation rates while maintaining the highest standards of academic excellence. will serve as an SEL and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy subject matter expert and co-facilitate and guide all the CoP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Evaluation Support (contractual)</td>
<td>[Name]</td>
<td>is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policies with expertise in the sociology of education and inequality. will assist NIET’s Research and Evaluation department to disseminate project findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM/Computer Science Faculty Expert (contractual)</td>
<td>[Name]</td>
<td>is an Associate Professor of Educational Technology with expertise in self-regulated learning, learning analytics, computer science education and open education resources. will serve as content faculty expert and will co-develop and deliver STEM and Computer Science content training and participate in CoP.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
is a Clinical Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator of graduate programs in Educational Leadership. will serve as content faculty expert and will co-development and deliver STEM and Computer Science content training.

(3) Adequate Procedures for Ensuring Feedback and Continuous Improvement

To ensure feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project, the NIET Project Director Dr. Ann Shaw will manage all aspects of the initiative. The Project Director will work with project staff to ensure that the project is on target to meet its intended outcomes. The objectives of this project have clearly defined benchmarks that will be used to periodically assess the progress of the project (Table 2). The regular reviewing of progress towards meeting these benchmarks will allow for the identification of successes as well as areas in need of improvement. Numerous strategies will be used to ensure active communication, feedback, and continuous improvement. The NIET Project Director will conduct monthly meetings with District Leads from participating cohorts, NIET’s Principal Investigator, and NIET Leadership Coaches to ensure strong implementation fidelity and discuss solutions for any issues that may arise. The Project Director will work closely with the Leadership Coaches to ensure all project activities are implemented with quality and fidelity. Leadership Coaches will collaborate with District Leads, deliver trainings, provide on-site leadership coaching support as needed to school leaders, and co facilitate quarterly CoP meetings. The Project Director will prepare a monthly report on the frequency and types of support delivered to school leaders and District Leads. Additionally, the evaluation team will have quarterly meetings with the Project Director to provide updates on the project implementation and impacts corroborated with data and to ensure timely data collection for program evaluation and federal reporting.
D. Quality of the Project Evaluation

The evaluation will be led by NIET’s Research and Evaluation department, which has extensive experience supporting large-scale evaluations of education programs. The program’s logic model (Appendix H) will be used to specify the inputs, outputs, and short-term outcomes expected from the intervention, as well as the expected paths from the outputs and short-term outcomes to longer-term effects on educators, schools, and students. NIET will collaborate with partner LEAs to monitor implementation, inform program improvements, and assess impact. The evaluation plan is organized around the Project Goals, Performance Measures, and Outcomes (Table 2) and will consist of formative evaluation and impact evaluation. The formative evaluation will include both quantitative and qualitative analyses to evaluate the degree of program implementation fidelity and to provide performance feedback and periodic assessment of progress towards achieving intended outcomes. The impact evaluation is designed to provide evidence of program effectiveness that will meet WWC standards with reservations as measured by educator retention and student achievement—two outcomes that research has shown to be associated with improvements in school leadership practices (Allensworth, 2012; Boyd et al., 2011; DeAngelis & White, 2011; Grissom, 2011; Ladd, 2011).

The impact analysis will focus on these outcomes due to variation in the frequency of South Carolina school leaders’ formal evaluations (State of South Carolina Department of Education, 2017). School leaders with one or two years of experience or with out-of-state experience (Tier 1) are formally evaluated on all South Carolina PADEPP performance standards each year, while others (Tier 2) are evaluated through informal, partial evaluations annually on Instructional Leadership and Principal’s Professional Development standards with full evaluations conducted every third year. Due to the inconsistent evaluation process across school...
leaders with different levels of experience, we will not be able to use this measure for an analysis that meets WWC standards. However, NIET Leadership Coaches and District Leads will annually evaluate project participants on four PADEPP standards that specifically align with the NIET Principal Leadership Series: Instructional Leadership, Climate, Staff Development, and Principal’s Professional Development during the two intervention years as a way to assess improvement in leadership capacity.

(1) Evaluation will Produce Evidence that will meet the WWC Standards with Reservations

The impact evaluation is designed to produce evidence about the program’s effectiveness that will meet WWC standards with reservations through a quasi-experimental design. NIET will use propensity score matching to create matched samples of SCPLN participants and non-participants who are baseline-equivalent with respect to important sample characteristics, especially student achievement, race/ethnicity, and economic status by school, as well as the specific outcome variable of interest. Propensity score analysis has been applied in diverse disciplines in many contexts, including education (e.g., Adelson, 2013). Analysis samples will be constructed so that treatment and comparison groups do not differ by more than .25 standard deviations on baseline characteristics, especially on the pre-intervention outcome measure, per WWC guidelines. Statistical control will be used to equate remaining differences. When a pre-intervention outcome measure is not available, we will use alternative pre-intervention measures related to that outcome variable that are accepted by WWC. The evaluation team will use these samples to answer three research questions (RQs) about the impact of the SCPLN program on educator retention and student achievement. The details of the matching are discussed in more detail below with respect to the specific evaluation questions.
We expect high rates of participation (low attrition) because SCPLN provides a means for school leaders to fulfill their required hours of professional development through high-quality virtual programming, with only a handful of in-person events over its duration (see Table 1). We will address any participation issues through personalized contact from project staff and site visits in the first year, which will include a request for feedback to determine factors hindering attendance. Analysis will include all network school leaders (for RQ 1 and their schools for RQ 2 and RQ 3) regardless of whether or not they participate in all program activities to estimate the impact of offering the program to school leaders or “intent to treat” (Jacob et al., 2015).

**RQ 1: What is the impact of the SCPLN program on school leader retention?**

School leader retention will be measured at the individual level and defined as school leaders who remained in their position at their respective schools at the end of the two-year intervention (or corresponding years for matched school leaders). To examine the impact of the SCPLN program on school leader retention, matched samples of school leaders will be created using propensity score matching to equate school leader’s characteristics (e.g., average years of school leader experience) and their school characteristics (e.g., student performance as measured by the state assessments, percent of students in poverty) at the pre-intervention year, per WWC guidelines. The evaluation team will collect data on school leader retention, their characteristics and the characteristics of their schools from LEAs and publicly available data from the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDOE) website. Note that because the three-year grant period ends in September 2023, outcome data will not be available for Cohort 3 who will only be in the first year of the intervention during the final year of the grant. As such, this analysis will only include data from the first two cohorts. We anticipate approximately 100 school leaders in the first two cohorts, plus 100 matched school leaders. We expect the final sample size
to be slightly smaller than 200 due to participant attrition and the use of additional matching factors. With an attrition rate of 10%, the estimated total sample size will be approximately 180 (see Table 4 for a summary of measures and sample sizes). Were this a randomized trial (a method which propensity score matching attempts to mimic), this sample would provide 80% power to detect an odds ratio of 2.14 (equivalent to Cohen’s $d = .18$) for a one-tailed test of difference between groups using logistic regression. Using this matched sample, we will estimate the program effect on school leader retention by modeling the probability of school leader retention as a function of SCPLN participation, number of years at current school, and other covariates that are correlated with school leader retention (e.g., years of school leader experience, school performance as measured by state assessments, percent of students in poverty and/or student racial/ethnic composition). We will make efforts to include matched school leaders from the same school in the instance we have network leaders from the same school.

**RQ 2: What is the impact of the SCPLN program on teacher retention?**

Teacher retention will be measured as the proportion of teachers who remained in the same school at the end of the two-year intervention (or corresponding years for matched schools). In contrast to the sample in RQ 1, where the outcome variable was whether an individual remained in their school, here we are asking about change at the school level. Because participating principals and assistant principals could be at the same school and thus would have the same measure for teacher retention, **we will only include an individual school once in our analyses, even if we have multiple school leaders from that school.** To examine the impact of the SCPLN program on teacher retention in schools where the school leaders participated in the program, matched samples of schools will be created using propensity score matching to equate school-level teacher retention at pre-intervention and their school characteristics (e.g., school
performance, percent of students in poverty). Retention data and other school-level data will be obtained from the SCDOE website or requested from LEAs. **This analysis will only include data from the first two cohorts** because Cohort 3 participants will be in the first year of the intervention in the final grant year. Based upon the estimated number of 25-35 schools participating in each cohort and accounting for a 10% attrition rate, our total matched sample will be approximately 108 schools (60 participating schools and 60 matched schools). Were this a randomized trial, this sample would provide 80% power to detect an effect size of .06 for a one-tailed test of difference between groups using multiple linear regression. Using this matched sample, we will estimate the program effect on teacher retention by modeling the school-level teacher retention as a function of SCPLN participation, school-level teacher retention at pre-intervention, and other variables that are correlated with teacher retention (e.g., average years of teacher experience, school-level teacher retention rate, school performance as measured by the state assessments, percent of students in poverty and/or student racial/ethnic composition).

**RQ 3: What is the impact of the SCPLN program on student achievement in STEM?**

Student performance in STEM subjects will be measured using the percent of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Math and Science state assessments at each participating school. Like in **RQ 2, our unit of analysis will be school rather than individual school leader.** Data will be obtained from the SCDOE website at pre-intervention and at the end of the first intervention year when participants will have completed professional development related to leading and strengthening STEM programs. To examine the impact of the SCPLN program on student performance, matched samples of schools will be created using propensity score matching to equate student performance on these assessments at pre-intervention year and other school characteristics (e.g., percent of students in poverty, grade span, size of school). **Analysis**
will include all three cohorts, yielding 95 participating schools (i.e., 25-35 schools per cohort) and 95 matched schools. We expect the final sample size to be slightly smaller than 190 due to participant attrition and the use of additional matching factors. With an attrition rate of 10%, the estimated total sample size will be approximately 171. Were this a randomized trial, this sample would provide 80% power to detect an effect size of .04 for a one-tailed test of difference between groups. Using this matched sample, we will estimate the program effect on student performance on STEM subjects by modeling school-level student performance on Math and Science, separately, as a function of SCPLN participation and other school characteristics including prior achievement, student racial/ethnic composition, size of school, percent of students who are receiving special education services, and percent of students in poverty.

Table 4. Summary of Units of Measurement and Total Sample Size for Each Research Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question: Outcome</th>
<th>Unit of Analysis</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Total Matched Sample</th>
<th>10% attrition</th>
<th>Estimated Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: School Leader Retention</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>1 50</td>
<td>50 NA*</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2: Teacher Retention</td>
<td>school</td>
<td>24 36</td>
<td>NA*</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3: Student Achievement</td>
<td>school</td>
<td>24 36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>19 171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *NA signifies that these data will not be available at the time of analysis.

(2) Evaluation will provide Performance Feedback and Periodic Assessment of Progress.

The formative evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress towards achieving intended outcomes. NIET will work collaboratively with BranchED, UofSC, and partner LEAs to (1) establish fidelity of implementation indicators and benchmarks for key components of the program and (2) develop a data system to track program progress and provide data for the fidelity of implementation analysis covering each
cohort of participants in the SCPLN program. NIET will collect programmatic data from BranchED, UofSC, partner LEAs, and NIET data systems, as well as draw from publicly available data, and data requested from the SCDOE to answer research questions and measure the key project outcomes.

Data used to assess fidelity of implementation will come from a rigorous data collection process. NIET will track the timing, frequency, and types of training, on-site support, and CoP delivered to each cohort to evaluate whether the intervention is delivered as intended. Additionally, attendance at each training and CoP will be documented for each participant in order to evaluate the extent to which school leaders continue to actively engage in all aspects of the intervention. The quality of the intervention will be assessed and continually improved through the examination of program artifacts (e.g., training materials, assessments) and qualitative data from annual surveys, focus groups, and interviews with program designers, project staff and participants. After analyzing these data from Cohort 1’s first year, they will be shared with program designers and project staff to improve implementation and programming for Cohort 2, and the same will happen the following year. Formative findings, such as needs in particular sites, challenges of implementation, contextual factors that help or hinder strong implementation, as well as potential revisions to program components to improve program quality and success, will be shared through multiple mechanisms, including monthly calls, quarterly updates, and annual reports, to collaboratively support the continuous improvement process.

To ensure reliability and validity of qualitative data, information from multiple respondents as well as program documents and data system reports will be reviewed. Focus group sessions will be recorded, transcribed, and coded by at least two researchers. To address
the reliability of the qualitative analysis, inter-coder agreement will be examined and only themes agreed upon by both coders will be reported. This work, along with analyses of the relationships between implementation measures and important intermediate outcomes, will also help identify key mediators and moderators that limit or enhance implementation. The surveys administered to teachers and/or students will be adapted from several existing measures that have been shown to be valid and reliable (e.g., Delaware School Climate Survey, Comprehensive School Climate Inventory, and the Center for Research in Education Policy School Climate Inventory). If established items are not available, we will construct our own and conduct analyses to examine the psychometric properties for survey measures.

(3) **Objective Performance Measures Clearly Related to the Intended Outcomes**

The evaluation will include the use of a wide range of objective performance measures that are related to project goals, objectives, and outcomes as outlined in Table 2. Quantitative data for these objective performance measures will come from LEA’s hiring records, the SCDOE website (obtained directly from the website for publicly available data, otherwise through submitting formal data requests), and surveys. Qualitative data will come from semi-structured interviews and focus groups with network school leaders and teachers administered by NIET.

The goal of SCPLN is to build and accelerate the leadership capacity of 150 school leaders across six South Carolina LEAs serving high concentrations of students living in poverty. We will accomplish this by providing (1) high-quality virtual professional development, (2) quarterly on-site coaching, and (3) quarterly networking opportunities via CoP. SCPLN will impact 58,385 students and 3,289 teachers in 95 schools across the state of South Carolina through improving school leaders’ leadership skills, educator retention, school culture, and student outcomes.