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The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) proposes the development and evaluation of **Youth Leadership Now** (YLN), an **EIR early-phase** grant that meets *Absolute Priority One*: Strong Rationale, *Absolute Priority Two*: Field-Initiated Innovation and *Absolute Priority Four:* Fostering Knowledge and Promoting the Development of Skills that Prepare Students to be Informed, Thoughtful, and Productive Individuals and Citizens and promotes social and emotional learning. IDRA, a non-profit organization with an exemplary record of improving student achievement for underserved youth, submits this application in partnership with Education Service Center Region 19 (ESC19) in El Paso and 12 high-need middle schools in West Texas and New Mexico. At least 50% of these schools are rural as designated by NCES.

Youth Leadership Now is a field innovation based on IDRA's work in the socio-emotional learning (SEL) and noncognitive field. YLN positively impacts noncognitive, academic mindsets (academic belonging, academic growth mindset, self-efficacy and belief in the value of academic pursuit) of middle school students by: (1) creating an elective course where 650 8th-grade, high-need students who are at-risk[1] develop positive academic mindsets and leadership skills by being placed as **YLN tutors** of kindergarten and first grade students; (2) providing **mentors** to YLN students as they prepare to transition from middle school to high school; (3) creating a **professional learning community for mentors** designed to deliver job-embedded professional development and propagate practices that increase positive academic mindsets across the wider campus; and (4) implementing IDRA's intergenerational family leadership model, **Education CAFE™** (Community Action Forums for Excellence), to engage families and YLN students in **youth action research equity projects**. Through these innovative, field-initiated components, YLN will improve academic mindsets to increase the academic skills (math and English language arts

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[1] At-risk as defined as students who have been retained, are behind one or more grade levels, are failing one class, have poor attendance or have dropped out in the past, experience homelessness or foster care (Neild, et al., 2007).

STAAR scores) of high-need 8th grade students in West Texas and New Mexico. This basic premise of affecting academic mindsets to improve academic achievement is based on SEL theory and research (Farrington, 2012, pg. 65).

YLN addresses **Competitive Preference Priority 2(b)(1): Projects designed to address the needs of underserved students most impacted by COVID-19 by re-engaging students (and their families) and strengthening relationships between educators, students and families**, by engaging students, families, caretakers, educators and administrators in the implementation of innovative practices that improve noncognitive academic mindsets. The basic experience of YLN is cross-age tutoring. This alone creates a bond for students, a greater understanding school connectedness as students in at-risk situations see themselves as a contributing part of the education community. The mentoring component deepens relationships between students and teachers. The Education CAFE creates an intergenerational experience that engages all participants in education issues and support. These interrelated activities directly respond to the COVID-19 context that has wreaked havoc on our education systems.

Student and family participation in YLN's intergenerational Education CAFE to complete youth action research equity projects will also address **Competitive Preference Priority 3: Promoting Equity by involving diverse stakeholders to include students, families, caretakers, educators, and community leaders in state and local education decisions**. Student, family, and educator participation in Education CAFEs and youth action research equity projects is designed to center student voice in equity discussions concerning literacy issues, culturally sustaining pedagogies, school resources and family engagement issues.

Partners: ESC19 is a Local Education Agency (LEA) serving West Texas schools by providing training and technical assistance. It is embedded in the heart of the educational community. All districts in the area we will serve are Title I with high levels of the at-risk

population classifications. IDRA and ESC19 have partnered to provide online and onsite professional development to 3,000 teachers in a large school district in the U.S. South that needed to transform how their teachers worked with English learners. Together, we have worked over 3,000 hours with cadres of teachers. Our partnership is strong, successful and allows us to leverage ideas, resources and top-notch educators. As outlined by TEA, ESC19 works with Anthony ISD, Canutillo ISD, Clint ISD, Dell City ISD, El Paso ISD, Fabens ISD, Ft. Hancock ISD, San Elizario ISD, Sierra Blanca ISD, Socorro ISD, Tornillo ISD, Ysleta ISD, and others. At least half of these districts are rural.

As it is customary for grants with education service centers, the first half of the YLN development year will be spent finalizing relationships with districts and creating MOAs with participating campuses. Due to the surge in COVID-19 variant cases, many districts were not able to attend YLN information sessions that IDRA and ESC19. Even with that hardship, we secured five districts before our official recruitment period found in our management table. The following Texas districts have already agreed to be part of YLN: Canutillo ISD, Dell City ISD, San Elizario ISD, Sierra Blanca ISD. Also, because there is a long history of partnerships between ESC19 and New Mexico school districts, YLN will serve districts in that area. It is logical for West Texas and New Mexico schools to work together as the area has familial, linguistic, and cultural ties spanning generations. Hatch ISD from New Mexico has already agreed to participate.

A. Significance

1. Promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies

Addressing Absolute Priorities
YLN provides a four-pronged approach to addressing SEL/noncognitive factors through (1) **cross-age tutoring** by placing 8th-grade students who are deemed at-risk as K-1 tutors; (2) **mentor experiences** for these tutors as they transition from middle school to high school; (3) **professional learning communities** (PLCs) for mentors on the power of using asset-based practices with

students in at-risk situations to facilitate institutional transformation; and (4) participation in IDRA Education CAFEs where students and families complete **action research equity projects**.

YLN distinguishes itself from most existing SEL/noncognitive programs and curricula by providing lived experiences for underrepresented, at-risk students to succeed and transform their identities from problematic at-risk students to valued leaders. This process is reinforced by mentors who are middle school teachers supporting student growth and development. In addition to affecting individual students who are in at-risk situations, YLN supports adult change agents who practice asset-based approaches to affect the entire school. To further cement student leadership and increased academic mindsets, YLN students will participate in community-based Education CAFEs and carry out youth action research equity projects that center student voice in equity discussions concerning literacy issues, culturally sustaining pedagogies and even school resources.

The approach described in this proposal explicitly builds **noncognitive** academic mindsets that are correlated to greater academic achievement and explicitly and logically aligned to **EIR Absolute Priorities 2 & 4.** YLN addresses **AP2** by developing a "field-initiated innovation designed improve the student achievement of high need students." YLN also addresses **AP4** that calls for field-initiated innovations designed "to improve academic achievement… by preparing students to do one or more of the following: (a) Develop positive personal relationships with others; (b) Develop determination, perseverance, and the ability to overcome obstacles; and (c) Develop self-esteem through perseverance and earned success." YLN is an innovation that creates opportunities for students to develop positive **academic mindsets** (academic belonging, academic growth mindset, self-efficacy and belief in the value of academic pursuit) that form the basis for **AP4**'s priorities. YLN's most basic outcomes, then, address AP4. YLN is meant to create sustainable opportunities that will help schools shape a future where students in at-risk situations are all "informed, thoughtful, and productive individuals and citizens" (AP4) ready to provide the

leadership our country needs.

Building on Positive Research: Academic Mindsets

At its core, this innovation is designed to improve students' academic mindsets for students and teachers to learn how to create opportunities for all students to improve academic mindsets through asset-based practices. The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (CCSR) published the seminal report on social-emotional/noncognitive skills, *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance* (Farrington, et al., 2012), that defines academic mindsets by four indicator statements: (1) I belong in this school; (2) My ability and competence grow with this effort; (3) I can succeed; and (4) This academic work has value. The CCSR meta-evaluation reported that, when schools provide experiences that foster positive **academic mindsets**, students persevere in the face of educational challenges and make significant academic gains (Farrington, et al., 2012, pg. 65).

The authors make several recommendations that YLN builds on. The report states that schools should (1) "implement intervention programs that help students achieve positive mindsets," (2) change "institutional structures and practices so that… educational experiences lead students to conclude that they belong in school" (pg. 37), and (3) have more supports for middle school students rather than the traditional less-supportive calls for "students to develop independence," which "often does not provide psychological conditions… important for building academic mindsets" (pg. 64). (Farrington, et al., 2012)

YLN creates a promising new strategy by intentionally addressing the recommendations in the CCSR report. We propose an intervention causing students in at-risk situations to feel they belong in school. The mentoring component provides the supports needed as students stand on the cusp of transitioning to high school. The mentoring PLCs will propagate creating institutional structures and practices to increase positive academic mindsets.

YLN theoretical underpinnings for framing this intervention on academic mindsets is based on current research that links positive academic mindsets to academic gains. The CCSR's own findings concerning the correlation between positive academic mindsets interventions and academic gains has been repeatedly substantiated since its initial publication in 2012. Since then, at least three report statistically significant correlations between academic mindsets interventions and academic gains. In the compelling 2019 study, "Relationships Among Noncognitive Factors and Academic Performance: Testing the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research Model," the authors conducted the most extensive attempt to validate the model and the CCSR's claims concerning academic mindsets (Wanzer, et al., 2019). The study was conducted in a majority Latino high school in a low socio-economic district. The evaluation reviewed the validity of the entire model as originally proposed, which consisted of a framework that posited pathways between positive **academic mindsets**, **academic perseverance, learning strategies and social skills** that resulted in increased academic achievement. The findings suggest that positive **academic mindsets** have a greater influence on grades and test scores than "perseverance" and "learning strategies" interventions alone. The authors suggested that belief in the indicator statements – (1) I belong in this school; (2) My ability and competence grow with this effort; (3) I can succeed; and (4) This academic work has value – **may precede** academic perseverance or learning strategies. It is even possible, the findings show, that academic mindsets may simply **be independently more significant** an indicator than perseverance: "Academic mindsets stands out as a particularly important predictor of academic performance… **academic mindsets** comprised the only consistently significant factor for students across backgrounds. Together, these results suggest that academic mindsets deserve greater attention from researchers and practitioners" (Wanzer, et al., 2019). While the authors found positive correlations across student backgrounds, the results show a stronger finding for underrepresented students of color. The research explicitly

suggests that positive **academic mindsets** have a more direct pathway and correlation to significant academic success for students of color compared to white students.

These findings come as no surprise to students of scholars, like ███████████████ , ████████████ and ███████████████ . These luminaries in the field of culturally sustaining pedagogies have resisted simplistic views on SEL, perseverance, grit and growth mindset as too easy a set of ideas that lack student context, school inequities and deficit notions assumed by these same ideas (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gorksi, 2018; Hammond, 2015). Practitioners and researchers who work with equity issues in education have long suspected that certain SEL concepts, like grit and perseverance, assume that students are lacking in those noncognitive skills. As defined, these concepts and possibly many of the interventions based on those ideas do not value the inherent strengths and assets in underrepresented students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The academic mindsets framework seems to be closely linked to academic success with students of color. Why? To draw the line between current research on **academic mindsets** and education research, one must view the situation under an explicit *equity lens* that is attuned to race, class and gender. For example, each of the academic mindset indicator statements can be illuminated if turned into questions: (1) **Do** I belong in this school? (2) **Does** my ability and competence grow with this effort? (3) **Can** I succeed? and (4) **Does** this academic work have value? These are questions that students of color and students in at-risk situations ask themselves daily. These questions are justified as students are confronted with underachievement, inequitable resources, deficit actions and, currently, the uncertainties of COVID-19.

████████ speaks to this very observation in her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*. In the chapter about CCSR's academic mindsets, she states that constant negative self-talk becomes a negative counter-script to the indicator statements occurs and is reinforced by inequities, deficit-teaching practices and well-meaning cheerleading (2015, pp. 108-112). As a

researcher, she recommends that educators facilitate a different type of counternarrative that helps students truly believe in the positive version of the mindsets.

Similarly, IDRA's research and implementation of similar programs has long shown that placing underrepresented students who are in at-risk situations as campus leaders changes that negative inner script. The totality of the program, its combined effect (cross-age tutoring, mentoring PLCs and participation in the Education CAFE youth action research) all play a part in rewriting the toxic narrative. ███████ and IDRA suggest the following. (1) Students who often wondered if they **belong** at their school are now actively involved in a deeply important activity and can say, "Now **I** belong. (2) Student participation in a leadership activity short-circuits the negative self-image that comes from the "at-risk" label because they are part of a program that assumes their strengths and abilities. They believe, "**Now I** can grow." (3) Every day, students experience the challenges of teaching and experiencing other's learning and understand that academic success is a process. **Now** they believe in the possibility of their own **success** rather than believing they are academically broken. (4) Student participation in the YLN program that expects students to have opinions worthy of consideration and research now believe they have a vested interest in academic endeavors. Students **now** believe that academic work has value. This, the research shows, has an impact on academic achievement (Farrington, et al., 2012; Hammond, 2015; Wanzer, et.al, 2019).

Absolute Priority 2 Field Initiated Innovation & Absolute Priority 4

IDRA has a strong history of implementing asset-based youth programs that have long helped students rewrite deficit-based notions. YLN's cross-age tutoring component is directly influenced by the Valued Youth Partnership (VYP), IDRA's flagship cross-age tutoring, dropout prevention program. The program has worked for students across the United States (e.g., Arizona, California, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, New York, Texas), Puerto Rico, Brazil and the United Kingdom

with a success rate of over 98%. Since its original design, VYP has explicitly attempted to affect **academic mindsets,** as before they were defined by the CCSR, to decrease dropout behaviors and increase attendance, school connectedness and student achievement. The four indicator statements are explicit in the VYP's theoretical grounding and can be found *verbatim* as outcome measures in the program's research, implementation documents and the monthly student journal entries. IDRA's experience with this program demonstrates the current research: activities where students practice leadership and success are far more effective than prescriptive SEL lesson-based curricula. YLN builds on this research-based, field-informed recommendations and success. YLN, by design, is an "evidence-based, field-initiated innovation to improve student achievement and attainment for high-need students" (U.S. Dept. of Ed., NIA) and addresses Absolute Priority 2. Also, because it is an SEL innovation designed to affect certain skills (growth mindsets, perseverance, overcoming obstacles by improving academic mindsets), it addresses Absolute Priority 4.

2. Project results dissemination

In the previous section, we described how this project builds on crucial and current research of consequence to our current national experience. Because of the current context, IDRA will disseminate findings rapidly with more urgency than is usually expected of related research projects. COVID-19 has forced education research organizations to speed up the release of actionable data, technical assistance and project reports. We can longer afford to wait to project conclusion to release findings on promising efforts. Practitioners need information immediately and in formats that facilitate turning data and research into practice. For that reason, YLN will disseminate quarterly information in the following ways:

- concept papers on project design, research basis, and project components.
- guides designed for implementation of best practice strategies resulting from early findings; and
- practitioner-based research briefs designed to assist instructors and administrators in implementing project components best suited to their context

B. Quality of the Project Design

1. Quality of conceptual framework underlying the proposed activities

YLN's conceptual framework is based on the following theory of action: The combined effect of the four components (cross-age tutoring, mentoring, PLCs for mentors, Education CAFE youth action research equity projects) will positively affect the academic mindsets and academic achievement of individual YLN participants, and the mentoring and Education CAFÉ components will affect the wider campus staff teaching practices. In the Significance section above, we outlined existing literature and research that suggest the project will improve these relevant outcomes.

This section addresses **Absolute Priority 1 (Demonstrates a Rationale[2])** by outlining key project components and long-term outcomes that underlie the logic model (found in Appendix G). We review current research and assert a correlation to positive outcomes of at least **one** key project component as the U.S. Department of Education NIA requires. We have attempted to provide information on more than a single component. As noted, the Significance section outlines the research behind academic mindsets, a key project component. This section also provides research on the following key components: (1) cross-age tutoring, (2) PLCs, (3) teacher mentors, (4) What Works Clearinghouse Guidance documents, (5) IDRA intergenerational Education CAFÉ, and (6) youth action research equity projects.

Logic Model Key Components Summary (Appendix G). YLN will create an 8th grade elective course and accompanying curriculum where students will tutor K-1 students in a nearby elementary and receive training on cross-age tutoring, literacy tutoring, academic-mindsets. Students will participate in their community's intergenerational Education CAFE and complete a youth action research equity project. The YLN design team will develop the curriculum to assist YLN students throughout the year. The team will develop supports for the adults involved in the

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[2] "Demonstrates a rationale" means **a key** project component included in the project's logic model is informed by research or evaluation findings that suggest the project component is likely to improve relevant outcomes.

project. Every YLN class will be led by a teacher coordinator who manages the project's processes. Each YLN student will have a mentor. Each class will have about 25 tutors, and each mentor will work with three tutors (3:1 ratio), per IDRA's critical elements research. The team will develop professional development modules for teacher coordinators and mentors. These modules will include professional development on project management, mentoring and PLCs. The modules for adults will guide them in helping students in (1) their tutoring roles, (2) literacy training, (3) Education CAFEs, and (4) youth action research equity projects. The following sections cover the latest research on these components and how each contributes to improvement in academic mindsets and academic achievement.

Cross-Age Tutoring: Student Inputs, Outputs Impact on Short & Long Term Outcomes
Responding to Absolute Priorities: *AP2 Field Initiated Innovation & AP4*

Cross-age tutoring research shows the positive impact for high-need students (AP2) on (1) noncognitive factors, such as those found in academic mindsets (academic belonging, efficacy) (AP4 Improvement of SEL skills), and (2) academic achievement in class and on state test achievement (AP2 Academic Gains for high need students). The research concerning cross-age tutoring and its results has a long history. In the 1990s and early 2000s, various studies showed benefits to at-risk students who serve as tutors to younger students, including academic achievement in reading and mathematics, and promising effects for those involved in tutoring programs (McLaughlin & Vacha, 1992; Slavin, 2005).

Research on cross-age tutoring continues to show benefits in academic gains and noncognitive factors. The 2019 massive review, "Peer tutoring and mathematics in secondary education: Literature review, effect sizes, moderators, and implications" (Alegre, 2019) concentrated on peer-tutoring. It reported the statistically significant benefits of cross-age tutoring on tutor and tutee academic skills. The findings informed the Institute of Educational Science's

WWC "Research Considerations on Peer-Tutoring" practice guide (Joyce, 2021).

In another study, all teachers who participated in a mixed method study in 2019 reported that middle school tutors of kindergarten students showed improvements in non-academic indicators, e.g., leadership and confidence (Haynes, 2019). In 2016, a meta-analysis, reviewed 15 kinder/elementary school interventions and reported tutors were likely to benefit in non-academic *and* academic indicators (Shenderovich, 2016).

YLN is building on the promise of these findings and on the recommendations found in "Peer and Cross-Age Tutoring in Math: Outcomes and Their Design Implications," a seminal report on cross-age tutoring in mathematics (Robinson, et al., 2015). The report states, "Students whose academic performance is average and those who are classified as 'at-risk' can benefit from serving as tutors." IDRA's own VYP has long known this to be true. YLN will continue this practice. The Robinson, et al., report points to the effect of assigning a new role to students in at-risk situations as a powerful practice that impacts students' sense of self and belonging. This aligns with IDRA's experiences and ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ ideas on rewriting toxic scripts by providing leadership roles (Gorski, 2018). The report recommends content specific training for tutors regardless of ability levels. YLN puts this idea into practice. It will provide tutors training on cross-age tutoring, academic mindsets, leadership as well as content-specific training. This training will consist of modified versions of WWC Educator's Practice Guides in Reading and Numeracy.

The research cited so far is based on literature reviews and meta-analysis of quantitative studies that included quasi-experimental designs and clinical trials. The results suggest a positive correlation that cross-age tutoring can improve non-cognitive skills, academic mindsets and academic achievement.

Another study, "From 'Struggling' to 'Example': How Cross-Age Tutoring Impacts Latina Adolescents' Reader Identities" (Drake, 2017) used a qualitative approach that found a clear

connection between cross-age tutoring that transforms struggling students' inner dialogue from a negative self-concept to an *exemplary* identity. The study reviewed the process of how Latina adolescents grew into positive reading identities and abilities. According to the study, academic self-concept is more than just students' perception of their skills. Rather, it is deeply influenced by external school related factors. For example, "If some students have 10 teachers tell them that they are in the lowest reading group, they might just assume their reading ability is an immutable characteristic." This observation is powerful as it places the responsibility for fixed-mindsets, lack of grit and perseverance on school interactions. This is an alternate explanation to the current social-emotional learning practices that tend to place the onus too heavily on students. The study goes on to assert that, through cross-age tutoring, the school system places the student in a new role that negates the student's negative identity that it helped create. Students live down to deficit ideas rather than live up to asset-based practices. The study may be limited in scope since it only focused on a small sample of struggling Latina adolescents participating as reading tutors in a structured program. However, it suggests a logical connection between the positive effects of cross-age tutoring and how the school context creates negative opportunities. After all, one does not enter a school, with or without a label, in remediation or gifted classes. Students find these labels through their interactions as school. Thus, the research behind cross-age tutoring suggests that this key YLN component is correlated to increased academic mindsets and achievement.

Building on positive research – Professional Learning Communities

PLCs have long been a part of our educational landscape. But in the past few years, successful PLCs have refined their processes and goals from individualized teacher leaning to collective impact across the school in the form of systemic change (Stoll, et al., 2006). One study suggests that agenda and characteristics for PLCs designed for wider systemic change include, "(1) Shared values and vision, (2) Collective responsibility, (3) Reflective professional inquiry, (4)

Collaboration, and (5) Group as well as individual learning is promoted" (Stoll et al., 2006). The authors of another study, "Professional Learning Communities as drivers of educational change: the case of Learning Rounds," reinforce this idea by stating that the next step in successful PLC implementation is to explicitly create PLCs around topics that can revolutionize how teachers think about educational practices, school culture and classroom culture rather than only data-driven decision making (Philpott & Oates, 2016). The authors agreed that topics and agendas should focus on collective and systemic practice changes. YLN will design its PLCs in keeping with the latest research about PLC and education transformation (van der Heijden, 2019) as it is well aligned with our long-term outcomes of campus-wide changes.

Building on positive research – Teacher Mentors

The literature around teachers serving as mentors consistently shows benefits for students. *Teachers As Mentors: Models for Promoting Achievement with Disadvantaged and Underrepresented Students by Creating Community* by Aram Ayalon depicts the compelling story of one campus in Boston that transformed from a failing school to a success story where virtually no students drop out. Administrators attribute its success to a teacher-as-youth-mentor program. Specifically, because they now "embody an ideology and mission that put students at the center of their programs and structures" (Ayalon, 2011). Also, the school creates schoolwide practices that support the mentoring system that include "mentor meetings, co-mentoring," curriculum influenced by the mentoring program and mentor-to-mentor relationships" (Ayalon, 2011, pg. 3). While this is one case study of a highly successful program, the successes of mentoring programs can be found throughout. Other programs, work on the notion of mentors as student advocates who know everything about a student's academic life (Dynarski, et al., 2009). The academic benefits of mentoring are consistently found in major literature reviews about the subject. IDRA's mentoring component, will take the best research concerning mentoring's impact on academic

mindsets, academic achievement and campus-wide influence, such as the practices documented by Ayalon (2011) in Boston.

Building on positive research – What Works Clearinghouse Educator's Practice Guides

While the bulk of YLN's research basis is centered on middle school students (tutors) building academic mindsets through cross-age tutoring and other asset-based leadership activities, the project also will strengthen tutoring efforts by training tutors in WWC approved literacy and numeracy strategies. Of most interest to students and educators are the following three strategies (1) Developing awareness of the segments of sounds in speech and how they link to letters (phonemic awareness); (2) Decoding words to analyze word parts and to write and recognize words; and (3) Ensuring that each student reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension. Teaching practices addressing these three strategies are outlined in *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade* (Foorman, et al., 2016). Furthermore, the document recommends these strategies because they have been shown to have moderate to strong levels of evidence in increasing literacy skills in K-3 students. While it is not an outcome measure, nor a desired effect, to create "student-literacy" teachers, training on these skills will strengthen tutors' efficacy and abilities.

Building on positive research and practices: IDRA Education CAFE

Responding to Competitive Priority 2: *Developing and implementing strategies to address those needs through: Re-engaging students (and their families) and strengthening relationships between educators, students, and families.*

IDRA's intergenerational Education CAFE model has been in practice across Texas and in the U.S. South as a powerful alternate to traditional family engagement models. Education CAFE is an innovation for school-family-community collaboration. It is, in and of itself, an asset-based practice that recognizes that all families can play leadership roles in education. Their sole purpose is to collaborate with schools to improve the success of students in the community. The success of

this program has been documented in at least two independent publications (Montemayor & Chavkin, 2020; Montemayor & Chavkin, 2016). Critical elements of the approach include: (1) Valuing all families and assuming intelligence, high expectations for their children, and the will to take action in support of the education of their children; (2) Intergenerational family leadership, where families gather as families, children are part of most events, and youth gather to have critical conversations about school and education; and (3) Building positive image: when we see a child from an economically disadvantaged community, we see a child with potential – intelligent, creative, having dreams and desires – not hopelessly broken.

The Education CAFE model uses a deceptively simple process: (1) Provide student and family members with actionable, comprehensible data and information concerning their schools; (2) Conduct deep discussions with members about their experiences in their community schools; (3) identify, plan and carry out a group project to improve education. IDRA has facilitated intergenerational projects across Texas and the South through this model (Montemayor, 2017), such as family- and student-led surveys concerning Algebra pedagogy (Montemayor, 2004), school-community engagement regarding statewide lowering of graduation requirements and college readiness courses (Cortez, 2015), and local and state policies concerning equity issues (Montemayor, 2021). The success of these projects has ranged from complete overhaul of pre-service education in a west Texas high school to regional changes in graduation requirement in 10 South Texas districts. In YLN, Education CAFEs will host tutors to exercise their leadership skills, learn about equity issues and conduct youth action research equity projects.

Building on positive research and practices: Youth Action Research Equity Projects
Responding to Competitive Preference Priority 3: *Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities by involving diverse stakeholders to include students, families, caretakers, educators and community leaders in* **state and local education decisions**

IDRA's current experience with youth action research equity projects includes our recent

partnership with Seek Common Ground (SCG), which supports state and community facing organizations pursuing "equitable and sustainable education policies and experiences." SCG launched its community-led COVID-19 Response Action Accelerator in summer 2020 to support organizations in incubating innovative community ideas for addressing the effects of COVID-19 on education. From summer to fall 2020, a student research team comprised of four high school and college students led an IDRA survey research project that elicited the insights and lived experiences of their peers about the impact of COVID-19 on education. The student researchers created survey questions in four main categories: education equity, home stressors, at-home learning, and discipline in school. These categories reflected the current state of education in Texas during the pandemic and the existing equity barriers students experience in their own schools. Overall, the team collected 120 surveys from students in 11th grade through first-year college across 28 zip codes. Key findings include: (1) Three out of four students reported struggling with mental wellness concerns during the pandemic; (2) Students faced additional barriers due to virtual learning, such as poor Internet connectivity, social isolation, and insufficient opportunities during classroom instruction to take mental and physical breaks; and (3) Students faced immense pressure to maintain academic engagement and progress while managing home responsibilities, such as assisting school-aged family members in their own at-home learning, holding jobs to supplement their family's income, and dealing with personal healthcare needs (Campos, et al., In press). Through this youth action research project, students became researchers who investigated their own research questions. They investigated relevant topics about education equity that were most salient throughout the 87th legislative session. Furthermore, the student researchers crafted policy recommendations informed by their research. Building on our participatory action research, IDRA hosted a free virtual student advocacy convening during the first months of the 87th Texas Legislature led by our SCG research team. During this virtual event, students forged the

opportunity to: (1) learn about the results from the SCC student-led survey research; (2) discuss major education policy issues considered by the legislature, (3) discuss policy priorities and issues students considered critical for the legislature to consider; and (4) devise action steps for elevating student voices in education policy advocacy efforts in advocacy coalition spaces and at the capitol. Students cultivated critical conversations regarding their concerns about their learning experiences during COVID-19, specifically about barriers the digital divide posed while engaging in online construction and some of the negative health outcomes they experienced from prolonged exposure to screen time and social alienation.

Such equity project initiatives demonstrate IDRA's innovative efforts to promote intergenerational partnerships between students, community leaders, and advocates in both state and local education equity advocacy and policymaking spaces. YLN represents another critical and accessible pathway for engaging students in equity work, forging positive relationships with students, community members and their schools, and working to restore students' sense of efficacy in their own classrooms and in their own communities.

IDRA has historically included many of this kind of intergenerational initiatives in Education CAFEs. We propose to further formalize this practice by centering the voice of students in at-risk situations participating as emergent leaders in the YLN's Education CAFEs. In practice, the Education CAFEs will be the hub for the youth action research equity projects led by tutors in collaboration with families and educators.

2. Goals, objectives and outcomes

Over the life of the project, YLN will serve 650 8th grade students in at-risk situations, as defined by the Texas Education Agency, from at twelve campuses from least seven school districts. Four of our early recruited campuses are identified as rural by the NCES. The YLN project has four major goals: (1) Develop and establish an 8th grade local elective Youth Leadership Now class

with 20 curriculum units, accompanying professional development, and materials to increase student positive academic mindsets backed by research to increase academic achievement; (2) During pilot and subsequent implementation years (2023-2025), YLN adult participants (teacher coordinators and mentors) will increase their knowledge of increasing academic mindsets through (1) YLN classes, (2) mentoring support, and (3) participation in Education CAFÉs and youth action research equity projects; (3) During pilot and implementation years (2023-2026), 8th grade YLN students will increase their academic mindset and academic achievement; and (4) During pilot year (2023-24) and implementation years (2024-25, 2025-26), mentors will participate in professional learning communities and build their capacity to propagate practices that build academic mindsets across their own teaching practices and the rest of the campus. We outline critical project components, including objectives and outcomes in Appendix J-1. In Appendix J-2 (Management Plan), we delineate objectives and details of development, piloting and refinement for the professional development and YLN class.

3. Appropriately address needs of the target population or other identified needs.

More than 600,000 Texas public school students – over one in 10 students – did not complete assignments or respond to teacher outreach in spring 2020. More startling, schools flagged having "lost" or "no contact" with almost 2% of students during the same period. Black students and Latino students were most impacted by school closures and the abrupt transition to remote online learning. TEA reported that schools lost touch with Black and Latino students at over twice the rate of white students. (TEA, June 2020)
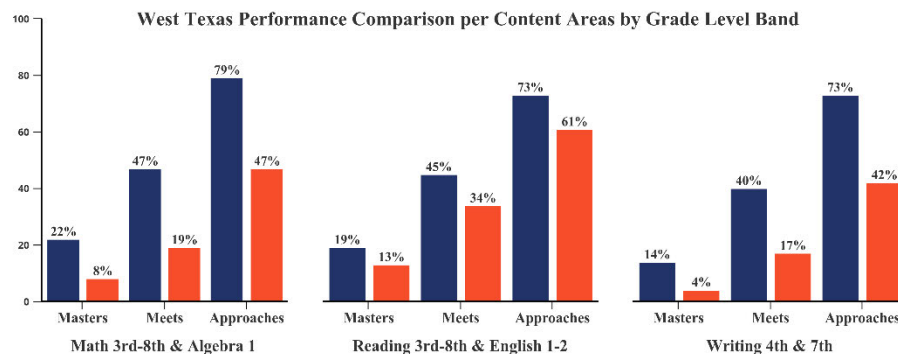
Recent unpublished TEA data concerning schools in the West Texas region demonstrate grim trends for student participation in "showing up to take tests" and alarming data on student performance on the most recent academic assessments in core content areas of math, English language arts and science. The data illustrate that public school districts in West Texas, which

serve higher densities of Black and Latino students, demonstrated decreased participation rates in academic assessments during the 2020-21 school year across elementary, middle and high school levels. The first table in Appendix J-3 displays the rate of enrollment by race-ethnicity for each of the 11 districts in the ESC19 area where the YLN program will be implemented. IDRA also collected comparable data for the two districts in Southeast New Mexico. The second table in Appendix J-3 displays the rate of enrollment for these districts by Title 1 and at-risk special population classifications. The districts overwhelmingly serve Latino students of color and students classified as "at-risk." All districts are classified as Title 1.

Overall, according to the data shared by districts in the West Texas region, their schools experienced the greatest change in student participation for writing assessments with a **37% decline** in the total number of students who tested in 2021 from 2019. This trend reverberates across each content area. Student participation rates for **science assessments declined** by **33%,** followed by rates for **math assessments** that declined by **32%** and **reading assessments** that **declined** by **31%.** These trends continue across all grade level bands.

General declines in students' participation at the end of the 2020-21 school year were coupled with diminished student performance across all grade level bands in all core content areas from 2019 to 2021. Districts endured their lowest drop in performance for math assessments with a 28% decline in students who met grade level standards or above. This pattern continues to emerge with a 23% decline for writing assessments, followed by 18% decline for science, and 11% for reading.

Texts students are disengaging at an alarming rate, and the data on West Texas student participation shows that these levels of disengagement have a far-

West Texas Performance Comparison per Content Areas by Grade Level Band

Math 3rd-8th & Algebra 1: Masters 22%/8%, Meets 47%/19%, Approaches 79%/47%
Reading 3rd-8th & English 1-2: Masters 19%/13%, Meets 45%/34%, Approaches 73%/61%
Writing 4th & 7th: Masters 14%/4%, Meets 40%/17%, Approaches 73%/42%

ranging academic impact. As research and studies have shown, students' morale and motivation are at an all-time low (Bauer, et al., 2020). Yet, traditional ideas of "motivation" do not hold the same currency as they may have had in the past. COVID-19 has added tremendous pressure to students' learning experience. Students of color bear the brunt of twin inequities: racial and economic injustice. They are the same students who already may have had negative associations with school. Now in this COVID-19 context they may be asking: Do they belong? Can I even grow in this effort? Is it possible to succeed? Does this work have value?

The lack of student participation in assessment during the COVID-19 crisis may be an indicator of a dangerous pattern that must be addressed. In this ever-widening spire of pandemic problems and ensuing educational inequities, how can we make positive changes to how we work with students in at-risk students? The data show such a high level of disengagement that any positive solution we attempt must be systemic as well. YLN addresses the critical question of how various layers of inequity, identifiable patterns of historical underrepresentation, and harmful narratives of students' academic self-efficacy ultimately comprises their academic achievement.

YLN addresses the needs of students by providing opportunities that encourage students' desire to participate as they become leaders that their younger peers depend on and respect. Furthermore, participation in the YLN program offers students a robust support network of mentors and like-minded peers. Through this network and through participation in youth action

research equity projects, students develop a greater sense of leadership founded in the contextual framework of an Education CAFE which recognizes their leadership role and capacity. Through mentor PLCs, ideas outlined in the YLN framework will have the opportunity to reach a wider campus student body, as one of the mentor's basic roles is to spread asset-based practices to their own classrooms and in IDRA-designed professional development sessions with their colleagues.

The data provided in this section points to a geographical area in great need of intentional investment and care. Schools must confront the undeniable truth that students require and demand innovative approaches to cultivating their leadership potential. Schools need students' unique leadership ideas to uproot the inequities that have choked out student potential for generations.

C. Adequacy of Resources and Quality of the Management Plan

1. Adequacy of the management plan

Exhibit 1 shows that project phases and who will be served. The YLN management plan (Appendix J-2) describes goals, activities, timelines and personnel for achieving our main goals: (1) Develop and establish an 8th grade local elective Youth Leadership Now class with 20 curriculum units, accompanying professional development, and materials to increase student positive academic mindsets backed by research to increase academic achievement; (2) During pilot and subsequent implementation years (2023-2025), YLN adult participants (teacher coordinators and mentors) will increase their knowledge of increasing academic mindsets through (1) YLN classes, (2) mentoring support, and (3) participation in Education CAFÉs and youth action research equity projects; (3) During pilot and implementation years (2023-2026), 8th grade YLN students will increase their academic mindset and academic achievement; and (4) During pilot year (2023-24) and implementation years (2024-25, 2025-26), mentors will participate in PLCs and build their capacity to propagate practices that build academic mindsets across their own teaching practices and the rest of the campus.

Exhibit 1: Phases Overview
The Management Plan in Appendix J-2 describes activities, and personnel in detail.

Year	Phase	Campuses	Classes	Students
January 2022 to Fall 2023	Development (Goal 1 & 2)	0	0	0
Fall 2023 to Spring 2024	Pilot (Goal 1 & 2)	2	2	50
Fall 2024 to Spring 2025	Implementation & Testing (Goal 3)	12	12	300
Fall 2025 to Spring 2026	Implementation & Testing (Goal 3)	12	12	300
Spring 2026 to December 2026	Analysis	0	0	0
		26	26	650

2. Qualifications of key project personnel

Exhibit 2 presents the key project personnel and their qualifications. This section also describes who is responsible for the two major types of activities: (1) Development activities are led by YLN's instructional design team consisting of a YLN director, curriculum specialist, professional development specialists, ESC19 specialists, ESC19 director and school district curriculum specialist and curriculum personnel (almost all activities are achieved as a collaborative, but certain activities will be led by members of the instructional design team and are designated as leads in the management plan); and (2) Implementation activities are carried out by the professional development/implementation team led by the director in collaboration by the professional development specialists, ESC19 specialists, and district and curriculum personnel. While the teams are designated and have responsibilities, the teams are fluid. For example, the professional development and ESC19 specialists will lend their expertise and feedback to development and implementation. As this project will serve 12 campuses, specialists and curriculum personnel from each district will serve on a rotating basis. However, all districts will be part of the development and feedback processes.

Our partners, ESC19, will provide consultants to assist in implementation of this efforts. They provide professional development in Bilingual, Early Childhood, ELAR/SLAR, Gifted and Talented, Instructional Technology, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, STEM/STEAM and Social-Emotional Learning. Among their ranks are some of the most well-respected consultants in

their fields that excel at program design and implementation. During our development year, ███

███████████, ESC19's director of academic instruction, will assemble teams from Region 19's

fifty plus professional staff to assist in YLN's development and implementation.

Exhibit 2: Overview of Personnel Experience and Responsibilities	
IDRA YLN Project Director	████████████ will administer and direct the project. ██████████ has directed and managed the international VYP for over 10 years, overseeing the training, technical assistance, and evaluation of 88 school sites, as well as overseeing expansion, impact and results dissemination. █████████ has managed programs similar and larger in scope than the YLN program. In this proposed project, she will refine the plan of operation in conjunction with the grants officer and have final responsibility for implementation of all proposed activities; ensure compliance with all timelines specified in the proposal; provide leadership oversight. █████████ will be responsible to the IDRA President & CEO who reports directly to the IDRA board.
ESC19 YLN **Field** Director	████████████, Ph.D., directs academic instruction and school support (AISS) at ESC19. He has over 30 years of experience as a PK-12 bilingual/ESL classroom teacher, high school principal and consultant. José has delivered professional guidance and technical assistance to schools across the nation in rural and urban contexts. As a former equity specialist for the IDRA EAC-South, ████████████ used his experiences as a high school principal to coach and mentor leadership development to strengthen campus leadership teams to improve academic performance for all students. ████████████ also assisted an intergenerational Education CAFÉ in Houston.
IDRA Curriculum Development Specialist	████████████, Director of Operations and Educational Practices at IDRA, has over 20 years of experience in developing and managing youth projects. For example, he implemented six community technology centers and managed a Youth Tekkie project where students provided training to families. He has produced materials and programs similar to and larger in scope than the YLN program. ████████████ will lead the development and implementation/technical assistance teams to create materials, manage timelines and oversee continuous feedback processes. In the past few years, he has provided leadership to creating culturally sustaining frameworks and equity audit tools. His experience in knowledge product creation around such frameworks will provide the necessary asset-based literature basis to this project.
IDRA Professional Development Specialist	████████████, M.Ed., will be the main contributor to the development of YLN's professional development model, curriculum and Education CAFÉ processes. He will assist in creating products and processes for YLN's PLCs and mentoring support. Because of his deep knowledge in family leadership and youth projects, he and Christina Quintanilla-Muñoz, M.Ed., will be central to those development activities and their implementation. ████████████ designed and tested the Education CAFÉ model and has implemented it throughout Texas and the U.S. South. His family leadership experience will help fulfilling CPP2. ████████████ vita shows the depth and breadth of success in creating models like YLN. He will be part of the development and implementation teams discussed in the Management Plan.
IDRA Professional Development Specialist	████████████████████, M.Ed., has deep experience in developing and designing youth action research projects that are impactful. She will assist in designing tools and processes for implementation of the youth action research equity projects. Her expertise in working with youth groups in advocacy projects described in the **Building on positive research and practices: Youth Action Research Equity Project**s section will be invaluable to YLN. She will be an active contributor to fulfilling CPP3.
IDRA Project Evaluator Liaison	████████████, M.S., will serve as IDRA's in-house project evaluation coordinator and the liaison with the external evaluator. ████████████ has had decades of experience with program evaluation and has a strong background in educational research, survey design, editing, program evaluation and quantitative analysis.
████████ External Evaluator	████████████████ is a Senior Associate at Abt Associates. He offers seasoned leadership and a depth of knowledge about evaluations and the evidence requirements for EIR grant evaluations. He is a senior methodologist with expertise in evaluation design, research methods, data analysis, and dissemination of technical results. ████████████ has applied these tools to a variety of experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations for several agencies including IES, HHS, and DOL. He is currently the Director of Analysis

for two Abt EIR evaluations. He is also Co-Investigator and Abt's Principal Investigator for an IES-funded methods grant studying external validity in educational evaluations.

3. Reasonableness of Cost

The costs associated with implementing the program during the development and implementation years are approximately $900 per student, which includes the multiple professional development sessions, technical assistance and observation time needed for final refinements throughout the life of the grant. Per IDRA's previous experience with federal research program grants, we exclude from the per-student calculation costs associated with evaluation, development management, consultant fees and personnel fringe benefits. However, YLN's implementation and professional development after completion of the grant will be based on two factors: (1) professional development, and (2) costs to access professional development modules and curriculum materials. Once developed, piloted and tested, the professional development cost will vary per time allotted and by capacity building of teacher coordinators and mentors at participating district. Based on experience, curriculum materials will cost approximately $150. It has also been our experience that if districts ask for implementation assistance from entities like IDRA, the costs per year are about $12,000. If a campus implements YLN with great fidelity, then we can expect an entire campus to be positively affected, bringing the cost per student down considerably. If, for example, a campus has 600 students, $12,000/600= $20 per student. Given the costs of many professional development programs full implementation costs for YLN products are quite reasonable.

4. Feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project

The YLN full management plan (Appendix J-2) includes detailed continuous feedback activities throughout the development and piloting cycle. The process follows these steps: (1) preparation; (2) design; (3) testing/pilot; and (4) refinement.

Goal 1, Objective 1.2 describes activities (1.2.1-1.2.3) where the instructional team meets

regularly to prepare guidance documents before the curriculum is written. Also, the product of Activity 1.2.3 is a set of iterative development tools to guide the feedback and improvement of the project's products. Goal 1, Objective 1.3 describes a cycle of development, testing and refinement activities. For example, the team creates modules in Activity 1.3.1. using the guidance documents from Objective 1.2. Activity 1.2.3 then states, "Test the first draft of the cross-age tutoring and youth action research equity projects modules with two middle school classes in target campuses." Results are integrated into model in activity 1.3.3. The feedback and improvement processes are built into all activities in this manner. We will use the same iterative process to create the first draft of the teacher coordinator and mentor professional development modules, online and onsite professional development modules. This begins in Activities 2.2.1 for teacher coordinator modules continues to first draft completion in Activities 2.2.5 through a review and testing process. We will then test this first draft again in the pilot year where the development team will observe a full YLN class. The observations will use the tools created in Activity 1.2.3 to further refine the model for the two full implementation years. During Goal 3 pilot and implementation year activities, the professional development/technical assistance team will document all processes for student selection, technical assistance, teacher coordinator efficacy, mentoring support, Education CAFÉ participation and youth action research equity projects. We will use the documentation for final recommendations on refinement.

Advisory Board. One of the most effective iterative processes for projects that have development phases is collaboration with an advisory board. This practice has served us well in other U.S. Department of Education-funded research projects. We have obtained commitments from the following experts in their field: (1) █████████████████, lead researcher at the CCSR and creator of the academic mindset's framework. As author of this seminal work, her contributions to this project will be immeasurable; (2) ████████████, author of *Street Data:*

A Next-Generation Model for Equity, has written extensively on intergenerational family leadership and engagement models. IDRA's work on Education CAFEs and her groundbreaking street data work share a basic belief in the abilities of families and of students; (3) ███████, is an activist scholar dedicated to centering "the voices of the end-users of education - the students, parents, and their community" through highly acclaimed youth action research; (4) a community activist who has helped changed educational practices; and (5) a West Texas emergent student leader recruited from activist "youth serving" community-based organizations.

D. Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. The methods of evaluation will produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the WWC standards

Abt Associates' evaluation will follow the phases of the project, as shown in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3: Project Phases and Associated Evaluation Activities		
Project Phase	**Abt Evaluation Activities**	**Goal of Evaluation Activities**
Phase 1 (Year 1): Intervention development	Develop study design plan, draft fidelity measure, data collection procedures	Prepare for evaluation
Phase 2 (Year 2): Pilot study in 4 schools	**Formative evaluation:** Conduct interviews and focus groups with teachers and students about their experiences	Identify areas for improvement prior to evaluation study, pilot implementation measures
Phase 3 (Years 3-4): Evaluation study in 36 schools (12 YLN, 24 comparison)	**Implementation and impact evaluation:** Conduct quasi-experimental study of YLN' effectiveness, conduct study of implementation fidelity	• Understand YLN effects on student math and English language arts achievement, academic at end of intervention (8th grade) and one-year (9th grade) • Under follow-up stand YLN effects on teachers' use of asset-based practices after one and two years of implementation. • Understand fidelity of implementation after one and two years in a school; and Contextualize impacts using data on implementation fidelity.
Phase 4 (Year 5): Reporting and dissemination	Analysis and reporting	• Produce final report detailing study findings and lessons learned for replication and testing in future contexts

Abt Associates will conduct an impact and implementation evaluation aligned to the YLN model that will provide both formative and summative data to IDRA. The evaluation research questions are: *Implementation:* Was YLN implemented with fidelity? What contextual factors facilitated or impeded local implementation? *Proximal outcomes:* What is the impact of YLN on teacher

attitudes and practice and on student academic mindsets and achievement at the end of the program in 8th grade? *Distal Outcomes:* What is the impact of YLN on student academic mindset and achievement one year after the end of the program in 9th grade? *Moderation:* Do student impacts vary by sub-group? Mediation: How do proximal impacts on teachers and students mediate the impacts of YLN on student academic performance and academic mindset?

A full set of research questions is shown in Appendix J-6. To answer the research questions in Appendix J-6, Abt will collect implementation data (site visits, observations of IDRA training, interviews with teacher coordinators and mentor teachers, focus groups of students, teacher coordinators, parents), outcome data (teacher surveys on classroom practices, a student SEL survey, student-level test extant data).

Impact Study Design. Abt will conduct a two-year cluster-quasi-experimental study at the school level. The 12 treatment middle schools will be selected purposively for YLN and then matched to up to 24 comparison middle schools. School is the appropriate assignment level because the YLN intervention is designed so that not only are the YLN students potentially affected, so are other students in the school. The YLN teacher coordinators and teacher mentors are trained in asset-based practices, to be used with the YLN students. However, these same teachers teach other students in the schools, potentially most of the other students, and their changed practices are likely to be used with the non-YLN students as well. IDRA will recruit the schools from districts in southwest Texas, approximately 60% that qualify as rural. Abt will work with IDRA to support district recruitment and communication with teachers and school leaders, to ensure that schools understand what the study will entail and to develop relationships and buy-in with study participants, and proactively prevent attrition from the study. In each participating middle school, it is expected that there will be only one YLN elective class each year, since it is expected that most of the schools will be small. In each of the two impact years, during recruitment, the school

will identify students who are interested in YLN as an elective class. If there are more than 25 students interested in YLN, the school will determine the best way to select the students for YLN. Outcomes for students and teachers in the YLN schools will be compared with outcomes for matched students in 24 similar comparison middle schools. With this design, the evaluation will estimate the immediate effect of YLN on student outcomes at the end of the one-year intervention (end of 8th grade) and the follow-up effect of YLN on student outcomes one year later (end of 9th grade). The evaluation also will examine effects on teacher practices at the end of one and two years of implementation of YLN. The design will provide evidence that will meet WWC Evidence Standards with reservations. Because schools will not be assigned to condition in a random way, in order to have the potential to meet WWC standards with reservations, the evaluation will need to establish baseline equivalence of the treatment and comparison samples of students and teachers separately for each outcome measure. If the difference between the treatment and control samples differ on the baseline outcome by less than 0.25 standard deviation units, the baseline outcome will be included in the model as a covariate. Although the WWC only requires matching at the student-level, we propose to do two-level matching at the school and the student levels to maximize the comparability of the treatment and the comparison groups. Research has shown that matching of intact groups (e.g., afterschool programs) prior to matching of individuals (e.g., students) can be particularly effective in reducing selection bias in quasi-experimental designed studies (Cook et al., 2008). We will first match treatment and comparison schools on demographic characteristics that might be related to the outcome (school size, proportion of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, proportion of students of color and emergent bilingual (English learner) students, and percentage of students who achieved a passing level on the 2022 state 8th grade math and ELA tests). We propose to use coarsened exact matching as the matching procedure. This process will result in a small number of school blocks with similar treatment and comparison schools in each

block. In a second step, within each block, treatment and comparison students will be matched on key student-level baseline demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, language) and their baseline academic mindset scores and their score on the state math and ELA tests in spring of 7th grade.

For the final impact analyses, we assume 36 schools (12 treatment and 24 comparison) and 50 students per school (two cohorts of students). The resulting analytic sample will include 600 treatment students and 1,200 comparison students Preliminary power analyses indicate that these sample sizes are sufficient to detect student effects at the end of 8th grade as small as 0.26SD (see **Power Analysis** in Appendix J-4). Recent studies of school-based academic and SEL interventions indicate that these minimum detectable effect sizes are reasonable for the proposed study outcome measures (Durlak, et al., 2011; Dong, et al., 2016).

Outcomes. The evaluation will provide valid and reliable performance data on the key outcomes of interest using measures that meet WWC standards for reliability and validity (Appendix J-5-**Outcome Measures for the Impact Evaluation**). IDRA will work with the districts to obtain data files for each participating school of individual student test data needed for the analysis.

Analyses. The analysis approach will compare changes in the outcome for students in YLN to changes in the outcome for students in the comparison group. The analysis will use two-level models that account for clustering of students in schools. The models will include school-level covariates and treatment status at Level 1 (school) and individual student characteristics, including baseline outcomes, at Level 2, and cohort. Separate models will be estimated for each outcome. The **analysis model** is specified in Appendix J-4.

Data Collection. For the student outcomes, data will come from two sources: (a) individual student test data will come from district administrative records that will be collected by the evaluation team and student surveys, which will be administered online using a platform previously set up by

the grantee. Data on teacher attitudes will be collected via online surveys using the grantee platform. All teacher and student survey data will be provided by the grantee to the evaluator, prior to any data review or data cleaning.

2. Performance feedback and periodic assessment of progress toward achieving outcomes

The implementation study will include qualitative and quantitative components. The qualitative component will be designed to collect information from YLN participants on their satisfaction with the course and their beliefs about its effectiveness, about barriers to implementation that might be avoided in the future, and ways the program might be improved. The quantitative component will be the systematic measurement of fidelity of implementation of YLN. The evaluation team will develop a measure of fidelity of implementation in line with EIR expectations: the measure will result in a separate score for each key component in the program logic model that indicates whether the component was implemented with fidelity in a particular year. The fidelity results will provide important context for interpreting the impact findings. Additional exploratory analyses will examine the relationship between implementation and impacts. Abt will work closely with IDRA during the evaluation plan development phase to finalize appropriate and systematic measures of fidelity of implementation for each of the four key components of the program logic model: the student curriculum, teacher coordinator supports, mentor teacher supports, and the intergenerational Educational CAFEs. The fidelity measure will specify, for each component, quantitative indicators of full implementation, a fidelity score, and threshold for determining if the component has been implemented with fidelity. A **draft fidelity measure** is included in Appendix J-4. Abt and IDRA will finalize the fidelity measure during the evaluation plan development phase and pilot it as part of the pilot study before using it during the two years of the impact study.

Challenges this project could face around implementation that we are prepared to address include: (1) lower than expected participation rate of teacher mentors in a school; (2) different

levels of teacher readiness to learn to use asset-based practices; (3) failure of Education CAFEs to develop concept for a youth action equity project. All of these point to careful monitoring of the result of our training and teacher understanding and willingness to adopt new ideas. As part of the training, we will have times when teachers are asked to talk honestly about their reactions and discomfort, and the training team will be prepared to make changes to the training "on the fly" if the changes could help teachers fully implement the model. Challenges the project could face around recruitment involve the need to identify 24 schools willing to be comparison, which involves administering the student and teacher surveys twice a year for two years.

3. Potential increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems or strategies

We are committed to disseminating the results of this project in ways that will enable others to use the information and strategies. First, we will share the results in ways that are useful for practitioners through blogs and mini-papers that could help educators understand how to integrate the promising practices from the project into their existing school practices. In the last year of the grant, we will apply to at least two conferences to present the findings. We have a strong track record of attracting educators to our webinars, convenings and publications.

This project and its evaluation have the potential to show the field effective ways to build youth leadership competencies and the effects these competences have on academic achievement and social behaviors. Particularly in a time when COVID-19 has robbed adolescents of key developmental experiences with a resulting loss in psychological health, an intervention such as YLN, if shown to be effective, could provide a blueprint for districts for relatively low-cost, engaging and student-centric approach to building schools' commitment to high-need students and to their ultimate success.