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A. Significance (20 Points)

Extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies. (20 points)

Nationwide, 9th graders' struggles transitioning to high school eventually lead to alternative education or dropping out. Northern Humboldt Union High School District (NH) is no different. "For many students, entry into [Gr. 9] is their first exposure to a completely departmentalized curriculum, extensive academic tracking, ordering of ability via class rankings, and recurrent reminders of graduation requirements."¹ In our rural area, many students struggle when they leave their K-8 support system and transition to NH a high school only district serving incoming students from 12 different K-8 districts. Their academic struggles first show on the D-F list. In autumn 2019 (the last prepandemic semester) 36.1% of all 9th and 10th graders had at least one D or F on their 1st semester report card. Last year (2021-22) this rose to over 40% of students.

A review of the last prepandemic class cohort (2019) at Arcata, McKinleyville and Six Rivers Charter High Schools shows 131 of 436 (30.01%) August 2015 freshmen left the comprehensive schools by Gr. 11. Of those 131, nearly ¾ had three or more D's or F's in Gr. 9 and 10. Class of 2019 and more recent students predominantly left for earning too few units; less often for social-emotional reasons; and only occasionally (less than 10%) for behavior (i.e. suspensions).

Note on Units/Credits and high school success: Of the many measures of high school success we propose the most important is earning enough credits to stay at the comprehensive high schools.

A promising MTSS Tier 2 strategy: Over the past 5+ years NH has developed a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) with emphasis on Tier 1 interventions including Universal Design for Learning (UDL), PBIS, Restorative Practices and Tier 2 and 3 mental health counseling/ supports. NH and school data are monitored using tools including the LEASA. These highlight how ~30% of Gr. 9 and 10 students need Tier 2 academic supports to stay in the comprehensive schools.²

Acorn: In late 2020 freshmen were failing online classes at crisis levels and without action, were destined for alternative education. NH Grants and Evaluation Administrator (and proposed EIR lead) [REDACTED] and MTSS lead [REDACTED] cobbled together one-time funding to open two in-person Therapeutic Learning Classroom (TLC)-style class-rooms in Spring 2021 to serve 33 freshmen who failed all or most of their Semester 1 classes. Mr. [REDACTED] and two

¹ "The Transition to High School as a Developmental Process Among Multiethnic Urban Youth," Benner, April and Graham, Sandra, *Child Development*, March/April 2009, Volume 80, Number 2, Pages 356–376.

² This need is not unique to NH. The two most comparable local high schools (in neighboring districts) also had a ~30% attrition rate over the same period as NH. This data was collected as part of local MTSS data analysis.

temporary hires, taught the classes. Students spent four periods in one classroom to reduce transitions and help them connect to caring adults. They spent two classes, plus break and lunch out in the school to learn how the broader school functions and make a wider group of friends.

We called the program Acorn, partly because 11 students were Native, some funding came via a Yurok Tribe's 2018 Education Grant, and acorns and salmon are foundational foods of local Tribes. Nearly 90% of students were low-income. Four didn't attend school in autumn 2020. Two were homeless. Three were Foster Youth. One was incarcerated. While TLC-inspired, we couldn't offer a TLC's aligned supports and student-centered teaching. Yet it worked: by the 2021-22 schoolyear 30 of 33 students had 50+ units and were on track to graduate. Last year (2021-22) using ESRS funds, the experiment continued at McKinleyville High where one class with 15 at-risk students took English, math, Tech/Health and study skills from one teacher. At the end of the year 13 of 14 (the 15th switched to Independent Study) had 50 or more units.

Need for a 10th grade class: This past year (2021-22) the 1st Acorn cohort did not get additional support in Gr. 10 and only 60% are now on track to graduate from the comprehensive schools. This autumn the other 40% will attend continuation or alternative education programs.

Why is staying enrolled at the comprehensive school so critical? Students who stay at the comprehensive high schools take college prep, elective, and CTE classes, participate in clubs and extra-curricular activities, and forge friendships with students and families from different social and socioeconomic groups. After high school these connections are particularly crucial for students from less-advantaged backgrounds when they pursue work and other opportunities where having community connections are critical—particularly in our rural area.

While unable to find data showing difference in earnings between continuation and comprehensive high school graduates, NCES' May 2022 *Annual Earnings by Educational Attainment* which shows median earnings of 25- to 34-year-olds working full time in 2020, suggests the impact. High school graduates earned 18.4% more than dropouts. Workers with some college earned 8.3% more than high school graduates. Associate degree holders earned 20.6% more than high school grads. Based on these data it is reasonable to suggest a roughly 9% (\$3,290 per year) difference between comprehensive and continuation graduates—a not insignificant amount.

The pilot Acorn classrooms (while stop-gaps) demonstrated a promising proof of concept. The EIR program offers the opportunity to implement with fidelity five TLC-style Acorn classrooms,

a critically needed field-initiated innovation to improve achievement and attainment for high-need students. EIR funding will allow us to rigorously evaluate the project’s impact; and together and with our community partners change the trajectory of at-risk students’ lives.

Acorn Project when fully implemented in 2023-24 schoolyear	
Arcata HS and Six Rivers Charter HS (1,150 students)	McKinleyville HS (525 students)
2x Gr. 9 classrooms (15 students x 2) 1x Gr. 10 class (18-20 students)	1x Gr. 9 classrooms (15 students) 1x Gr. 10 class (18-20 students)

As noted, NH is implementing Tier 1 MTSS to serve all students. Data directs us to the 30% of students (~100 incoming 9th graders yearly) at greatest risk of educational failure. Acorn will directly serve over ½ of these students by the end of Gr. 10.

Absolute Priority 1: Applications that Demonstrate a Rationale.
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.

Acorn’s rationale is research based and focuses on indicators that **can be positively influenced** by schools and families. In 2008 the California Dropout Research Project reviewed 25 years of research and found key predictors of success are student engagement, attendance, and “grades are more consistent in predicting which students will leave school without graduating.”³ The Project studied 48,561 students in 163 Los Angeles USD middle and high schools and found only 55% of students who end Gr. 9 with two or more F’s graduate high school on time and students who missed 14+ days were 2x as likely to drop out as students with better attendance.⁴

Early Identification of High School Graduation Outcomes in Oregon Leadership Network Schools, 2015 research from IES’ Northwest Regional Lab identified early warning signals for students who did not graduate on time or dropped out. The indicators (a GPA of 2.0 or higher and attendance of 80% or better) are important because unlike many indicators “they can be influenced by teachers and parents to help keep students on track for graduation.”⁵

Acorn’s rationale addresses NH’s chief student learning and success gap: low income, Special Ed, Native and Hispanic students not staying in comprehensive high schools at rates of students who are not low income or SPED or are white. It begins Semester 1 of Gr. 9 when students start to fall behind their college and career-going peers. It ends when credit deficient 11th graders leave the comprehensive schools. While most graduate from alternative schools, they are less

³ Rumberger, R. and Ah Lim, S, *Why Students Drop Out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research*, CDRP, 2008.

⁴ *What Factors Predict High School Graduation in the Los Angeles Unified School District*, California Dropout Research Project Report #14 June 2008

⁵ Burke, Arthur, *Early identification of high school graduation outcomes in Oregon Leadership Network schools*, REL Northwest and IES, April 2015.

prepared for college and career than peers who stay and graduate college-ready (as measured by completion of the A-G California University sequence or a Career Technical Education Pathway).

College and career readiness is complex, but simply put: alternative school students are almost never A-G college-ready or complete a CTE career pathway.⁶ Acorn responds directly to the EIR RFA’s call for “proposed innovations ... designed to better enable students to access educational opportunities they need to succeed in school and reach their full potential.” If we don’t keep students in the comprehensive high schools their odds of reaching full potential are much lower.

Humboldt County Community Data

Humboldt County, 300 miles north of San Francisco, is home to 134,809 people scattered over 3,573 square miles. The largest cities, Eureka (pop. 26,050), Arcata (17,201), and the unincorporated town of McKinleyville (15,000), are surrounded by redwoods, the Coast Range Mountains, and the rocky Pacific Ocean coast. The scenic beauty is offset by severe social and economic problems. Logging and fishing once provided careers for high school grads and dropouts are now a fraction of what they were. This isolated and impoverished region is cut off from resources available elsewhere, especially families on remote tribal lands including the state’s two largest tribes and reservations—the Yurok and Hoopa Valley Tribes.



Poverty & Household Income: Humboldt vs. CA Avg.	Humboldt	California
Median Household Income (2020 American Community Survey)	\$56,071	\$83,001
Children age 0-17 in Poverty (2019 Small Area Income Poverty Estimate)	20.5%	15.6%

Sources: US Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Services

Crime, Drugs & Alcohol: Humboldt is the US’s largest legal and illegal cannabis producer. It has one of the state’s highest arrest rates with an alcohol arrest rate 3.3x the CA rate.⁷ It has California’s 2nd highest Opioid Overdose Deaths rate (21.03 per 100,000 vs. a state rate of 5.22).⁸

Adverse Childhood Experiences

A key measure of the difficulties children face is **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**. The ten ACEs fall into three general types: (1) abuse, (2) neglect, and (3) household dysfunction. The CDC’s *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study* is one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess links between childhood maltreatment and later-life health and well-being.⁹ Of 17,000 adults studied, 75% were white, middle/upper class, and 76% attended college. Even

⁶ A review of five years of district continuation graduates showed less than 3% met the A-G requirements.

⁷ California Dept. of Justice, Open Justice website: <https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/agencies/county-map>

⁸ California Opioid Overdose Surveillance Dashboard, <https://discovery.cdph.ca.gov/CDIC/ODdash/>

⁹ Vincent J. Felitti et. al., “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 14, no. 4 (1998): 245-258.

among this privileged population, the negative long-term effects of multiple ACEs are stunning.

A Person with Four or More ACEs is:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5.13 times as likely to suffer from depression • 2.93 times as likely to smoke • 12.2 times more likely to attempt suicide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10.3 times as likely to use injection drugs • 7.4 times as likely to be an alcoholic

Humboldt has California’s highest ACEs rate: 30.8% of adults report experiencing **four or more ACEs** versus 13% statewide and 11% nationally.^{10, 11} Native American, immigrant, and low-income communities, are particularly prone to ACEs.¹²

ACEs & student success: A 2013 study by the Area Health Education Center of Washington State University found students with **three+ ACEs** are 3x as likely to experience academic failure, six times as likely to have behavioral problems, and 5x as likely to have poor attendance.

Note on School and Student Data and the Pandemic

At times, the narrative uses student and school data from 2019-20, before the switch to online instruction. This is because the switch skewed student and school data. For example, suspensions decreased by over 90% in 2020-21 because students weren’t at school—not changed practices.

Student Demographics: Our 1,761 Gr. 9-12 students are: 66.5% White, 4.8% American Indian, 13.9% Latino, 9.1% Two or More Races, 1.5% Asian, 1.0% African American, 3.2% other.

Chronic Absenteeism: NH schools’ rate = 20.2% vs. California rate of 12.1%. Chronic Absenteeism is defined as missing 18 or more days in a school year (10% of total days).

Suspension rates: NH schools’ suspension rate = 8.7% vs California rate of 3.4%.

Special Education: 13% of US public-school students receive special education (SPED) services. Rates for African American (16%) and American Indian (17%) students are highest. **California’s rate is 12.46%.² Over 23% of NH students** have IEPs or 504 plans.

Poverty: In Arcata, where over 1,200 students attend Arcata High, Six Rivers Charter High or Pacific Coast Continuation, the poverty rate is 37.4%.¹³

Arcata Education Site			
Arcata High School	1,112 total students	50.7% FRPM	37.4% Poverty
Six Rivers Charter High School	121 total students	50.7% FRPM	37.4% Poverty
Pacific Coast High School	61 total students	69.8% FRPM	37.4% Poverty
McKinleyville Education Site			
McKinleyville High School	525 total students	59.0% FRPM	18.0% Poverty
Mad River High School	32 total students	77.1% FRPM	18.0% Poverty

¹⁰ *A Hidden Crisis: Findings on Adverse Childhood Experiences in California* (San Francisco: Center for Youth Wellness, 2014), <http://www.centerforyouthwellness.org/blog/BFRSS>.

¹¹ The National Center for Health Statistics, *National Survey of Children’s Health*, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2012.

¹² Michael Vaughn, Christopher Salas-Wright, Christopher, et al., “Adverse Childhood Experiences among Immigrants to the United States,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 32, no. 10 (2015): 1543-1564.

¹³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/mckinleyvillecdpcalifornia,arcatacitycalifornia/RHI125218>

A proposal that is potentially nationally significant

Even though the project will occur in a rural area, Acorn is nationally significant in that it:

1. addresses a nationally significant problem (the difficulties student face when transitioning from Gr. 8 to high school) which if not addressed often results in high school failure;
2. is based upon REL research that sets clear, obtainable goals (2.0 GPA/80% attendance);
3. focuses on factors that can be positively influenced by schools, communities and families;
4. serves communities with some of the highest ACEs rates in California and the nation; and
5. serves schools with Special Education rates much higher than the national average.

Acorn has the potential to be implemented in any school setting: urban, suburban or rural.

B. Quality of Project Design (30 Points)

(1) Conceptual framework underlying the proposal and quality of that framework. (10 points)

Conceptual framework: (1) Unless at-risk 9th & 10th graders' social, emotional and academic needs are intentionally supported they will struggle and fall behind in credits; (2) Most students leave comprehensive high school by falling so far behind in credits in Gr. 9 & 10 that continuation or other alternative sites are the only way to make up those credits; (3) Each student who leaves a comprehensive school loses access to college prep, arts and STEM lab classes, plus CTE classes (that offer programs like Future Farmers or Skills USA that teach skills critical to future success); (4) nearly all on track to graduate 11th graders stay at the comprehensive school where they can develop life-long friendships with peers from socio-economically diverse groups; (5) Almost no students (less than 5%) return from continuation to the comprehensive schools.

Acorn Project Design

Acorn may seem “simple,” but it is not “easy.” It’s organizing concept is: identify incoming 9th graders at risk of failure; put them into a four-period Therapeutic Learning style Classroom (TLC) aligned with our MTSS; have them take PE and one hands-on elective class outside of Acorn to integrate into the school; ensure their teachers focus on not letting them fail; and bring in Tier 2 and 3 MTSS supports as necessary. Based upon our pilot we predict roughly ½ of these freshmen will thrive and transition to high school and not need additional support as sophomores, and ½ will need a second year of support in Gr. 10. Which is why Acorn includes Gr. 10 classrooms.

Gr. 11 and 12: While not directly funded by this grant, as Acorn students transition to 11th grade those still needing support will enroll in study skills classes, tutoring and other supports.

This is intentional. Acorn is not a four-year school within a school. It is not separate from the comprehensive school. It is designed to be integrated into existing comprehensive schools.

Dropout prevention in rural LEAs: Acorn’s design is informed by two 2017 National Dropout Prevention Center publications: *Rural Dropout Prevention Issues & Solutions* by Harmon, H., & Smink, J. and *The Rural Principal’s Guide to Dropout Prevention* by Addis, S., et. al.¹⁴ Acorn embraces the *Rural Principal’s Guide’s* design Principle 1—Identify Students Early; Principle 2—Build Strong Community Partnerships; Principle 4—Reduce Social Isolationism; and Principle 6—Create Options and Implement Creative Interventions.

Five Key Components of the Acorn Project Design

Acorn has five key components: (1) establish five Tier 2 MTSS TLC-style classrooms; (2) provide teachers and staff with ongoing, job-embedded PD in behavioral, SEL, and academic MTSS; (3) support adult learning with in-class coaching from two Instructional Coaches (ICs); (4) implement the WhyTry SEL curriculum and Check & Connect; and (5) meet weekly as site teams to monitor student progress and align/arrange supports—including services from partners.

Absolute Priority 2: Field-Initiated Innovations—General
Create and scale entrepreneurial, evidence-based, field- initiated innovations....
Absolute Priority 4: Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs to promote high-quality social and emotional learning projects.

Acorn meets AP 2 by implementing evidence-based, field-initiated innovations that support dropout prevention, formalized student supports, and research-based learning opportunities for at-risk students. It meets Priority 4 by providing a TLC-style learning environment where students’ SEL and academic needs are explicitly addressed using evidence-based interventions.

Acorn at a Glance				
2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassign key staff and select ICs & TLC teachers • Place staff in pilot TLC in January, '23 • ICs, teachers and staff trained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open all 5 TLCs • Coaching by ICs in all classrooms • Begin educator-specific PD & PLCs: teaching at-risk students • ICs support alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 TLCs continue • Coaching by ICs in all classrooms • Continue educator-specific PD & PLCs • ICs support alumni • Finalize sustainability plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 TLCs continue • Coaching by ICs in all classrooms • Cont. educator-specific PD & PLCs • ICs support alumni • Implement sustainability plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 TLCs continue • Coaching by ICs in all classrooms • Cont. educator-specific PD & PLCs • ICs support alumni • Implement sustainability plan

1. Acorn will develop five Therapeutic Learning Classrooms-style classrooms to provide a supportive environment so at-risk Gr. 9 and 10 students stay at the comprehensive schools and

¹⁴ <https://dropoutprevention.org/rural-dropout-prevention-resources/>

have greater opportunities. Research indicates students do better when they develop positive relationships with teachers; numerous transitions in the day are detrimental to unfocused students, and students with high numbers of ACEs often need intensive support.

Sample schedule for Acorn Students at Arcata High			
	Grade 9 Classroom #1	Grade 9 Classroom #2	Grade 10 Classroom
1 st	Health and Tech Class with WhyTry Social Emotional Learning (SEL) integrated (Acorn)		(Acorn) World History with integrated WhyTry Curric.
2 nd	ELA (Acorn)	Study Skills with SEL (Acorn)	Math (Acorn)
3 rd	Math (Acorn)	ELA (Acorn)	Life science (Acorn)
4 th	Study Skills with SEL (Acorn)	Math (Acorn)	ELA (Acorn)
5 th	PE (Acorn teacher prep)	Hands-on Elective (Tchr. Prep)	PE (Acorn teacher prep)
6 th	Hands-on Elective* ⁺	PE* ⁺	Hands-on Elective* ⁺

*Hands-on Electives will be Arts, Media and Entertainment and other CTE classes.

+Common Acorn Teacher Student Monitoring Meeting, Support and Collaboration Period.

Universal Design for Learning will serve as in-class instruction’s foundation. “UDL is based upon the most widely replicated finding in educational research: learners are highly variable in their response to instruction. In virtually every report of research on instruction or intervention, [students’] individual differences [are prominent] in the results.”¹⁵ UDL is a key Tier 1 academic element of NH’s ongoing MTSS.

Two highly qualified Instructional Coaches (ICs) will “push-in” to the TLCs daily so students are assisted by two classroom teachers in vital core subjects and teachers are supported. Acorn’s design (four periods in one classroom) gives students and teachers time to connect and develop positive, supportive relationships. ICs will also coach general education teachers to support Acorn students and alumni as they take classes in non-Acorn classrooms. Students who leave Acorn will be monitored by the ICs and continue to have access to support services and benefit from the relationships cultivated within the program.

We propose not the creation of new stand-alone schools or programs but by 2023-24 development of three Gr. 9 and two Gr. 10 classrooms integrated into the comprehensive high schools and serving about 45 freshmen and 40 sophomores yearly. They will provide MTSS and community-partner aligned supports to not just stay enrolled in the comprehensive high schools but to thrive.

2. Developing Qualified teachers, ICs and staff: Acorn’s five self-contained classrooms staffed by five highly trained teachers, five Classroom Behavior Support Aides and two ICs. But, expecting all of them to be prepared to support and develop positive relationships with at-risk

¹⁵ CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. Retrieved from <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

students is unrealistic without PD and ongoing support. Thus, teachers and staff will receive PD in behavioral, SEL, and academic MTSS. Teachers, administrators, Classroom Behavior Support Aides (one per classroom), and other support personnel (i.e. Counselors, Social Workers) will be trained in behavioral support, PBIS, de-escalation strategies, restorative practice, trauma-informed instruction, and relationship building. Teachers and staff must be trained and supported to serve the needs of highly at-risk students and become the caring adults students connect with.

Acorn must be more than just a “regular” high school classroom with fewer students. NH will employ a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) to provide ongoing PD and support to staff and develop behavior/social-emotional learning plans for TLC students. The BCBA will work directly with teachers, BSAs and ICs (~20 days per year per site). The BCBA will observe students and adults and help teams identify protocols and procedures to help students succeed. Teachers and BSAs will receive in class coaching from the BCBA and ICs focused on their students’ specific needs. Having a Behaviorist in the room will positively impact adult behaviors.

Five Principles of Effective Professional Development

Acorn’s PD is designed using the Center for Public Education’s **Five Principles of Effective Professional Development** align with the definition of PD in the 2021 EIR Early Phase RFA.¹⁶

Principle 1: The duration of professional development must be significant and on ongoing to allow time for teachers to learn a new strategy and grapple with the implementation problem.

Principle 2: There must be support for a teacher during the implementation state that addresses the specific challenges of changing classroom practice.

Teachers and staff will receive PD, support and coaching. Since 2012 NH and our County Office has operated a TLC classroom for students on IEPs. These staff and experts will provide training followed by in-class coaching (with IC support) to Acorn teachers, and staff.

Principle 3: Teacher’s initial exposure to a concept should be active and varied so they participate in experiencing the new practice first hand.

Acorn staff will receive active and varied initial exposure to new practices to provide the opportunity to put into practice the learner’s choice aspect of Universal Design for Learning.

Principle 4: Modeling is effective in helping teachers understand a new practice.

In-class coaching provides the most effective opportunity to model strategies and support implementation with fidelity. In-class coaching/modeling’s impact stems in great part from working with a teacher’s own students where they see the strategy works with “my kids.”

Principle 5: Content presented should not be generic but specific to grade level/content needs.

¹⁶ *Teaching the Teachers, Effective Professional Development in an Era of High Stakes Accountability*. Alexandria: Center for Public Education, 2013.

PD will subject and teacher aligned. Site leadership teams help guide PD to ensure a high-level alignment to teacher needs, is sustained over time and treats teachers like professionals.

3. Job-embedded Coaching: The BCBA and two ICs will support teachers, staff and students and model and support effective strategies in the classroom. The ICs will also push into general education classes serving Acorn students. The evidence for this practice is overwhelming: “The one-time workshop assumes the only challenge facing teachers is a lack of knowledge of effective teaching practices and when that knowledge gap is corrected, teachers will be able to change.... It turns out teachers’ greatest challenge comes when they attempt to implement newly learned methods in the classroom.”¹⁷ Michael Fullan states, “The area of greatest struggle is not in *learning* a new skill but in *implementing* it, something referred to as the ‘implementation dip.’”¹⁸ Research shows mastering a new teaching skill takes 20 or more separate instances of practice.¹⁹ Teachers’ *beliefs* about teaching change only *after* they see success with students.²⁰ If teachers do not feel successful or see their students succeed they revert to previous methods.

Classroom Observations to support Coaching: Critical thinking is a foundational skill in learning. “The Common Core. . . stresses critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career, and life.”²¹ It must however, be thoughtfully taught. “Explicit attention to the fostering of critical thinking skills and sub-skills, as well as dispositions, should be made an instructional goal at all levels of the K-12 curriculum.”²²

The *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*²³ how student engagement increases success. Specifically, to Acorn, since 2011 through six US and California Depts. of Education grants including NH’s 2019 School Climate/MTSS grant, ██████████ Ed.D. has conducted 500+ classroom observations using a student engagement and task complexity analysis tool based on the work of Phil Schlechty.²⁴ He found students demonstrate higher order thinking up to 6x more often when teachers us high engagement strategies like UDL. (See Appendix J for sample form.)

Dr. ██████████ will observe Acorn (and other) classes to provide student engagement data

¹⁷ Allison Gulamhussein, *Teaching the Teachers: Effective Professional Development in an Era of High Stakes Accountability* (Alexandria: Center for Public Education, 2013).

¹⁸ Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

¹⁹ Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, *Student Achievement through Staff Development* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2002).

²⁰ Thomas R. Guskey, “Professional Development and Teacher Change,” *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 8, no. 3 (2002): 381-391.

²¹ Common Core English Language Arts Standards, <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>

²² Dilley, Anna, et. al., *What We Know About Critical Thinking: Part of the 4Cs Research Series*, Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2015.

²³ Fredricks J.A., McColskey W. (2012) The Measurement of Student Engagement: A Comparative Analysis of Various Methods and Student Self-report Instruments. In: Christenson S., Reschly A., Wylie C. (eds)

²⁴ Phil Schlechty, *Engaging Students: The Next Level of Working on the Work* (Jossey-Bass, 2011).

(including individual students) that the teachers, BSAs, ICs can use to improve instruction.

4. WhyTry and Check & Connect: WhyTry is Acorn’s Tier 1 SEL curriculum. WhyTry uses a multisensory approach to teach critical social and emotional principles that help students learn to persevere despite failure. The California Dept. of Education’s Learning Communities for School Support Office recommends WhyTry as an effective method to build student resilience. In a study of WhyTry’s impact on alternative school students with emotional and/or behavioral problems, “Students exhibited significant differences from pre- to post-intervention in the number of office disciplinary referrals and several areas on the behavioral rating scales.”²⁵

Check & Connect will serve as one Tier 2 intervention. C&C is a Tier 2, group-oriented intervention designed for students whose problem behaviors are unresponsive to Tier 1 practices and systems, but do not require more immediate individualized Tier 3 interventions. Check & Connect has met the WWC evidence standards of the What Works Clearinghouse and is the only dropout prevention intervention to show positive effects for staying in school.²⁶

As appropriate, additional Tier 2 and Tier 3 mental health supports (counseling and therapy) will be provided by school and community partner clinicians through the existing MTSS.

5. Weekly Meetings: In weekly student monitoring meetings with teachers, ICs, BSAs, administrator, counselor, Indian Ed and other staff will monitor student progress to determine and arrange supports and services. Integral to this process will be student and family interviews to ensure their perspectives are known and acknowledged. In the event community supports are needed one person from the committee will be tasked with connecting the student to services. This will be reported out at the next weekly meeting—in part for accountability purposes.

Three Other Evidence Based Student Supports

Talent Search: Eligible Acorn students will enroll in Talent Search from Cal Poly Humboldt University. According to a WWC research review: “Talent Search was found to have potentially positive effects on completing school.” Two of the reviewed studies found Talent Search students graduated at much higher rates (86% vs. 77% in Florida and 84% vs. 70% in Texas).²⁷

Dual Enrollment: A review by the WWC finds dual enrolment has positive effects on high school achievement and completion.²⁸ All Acorn students will enroll in a three-unit Guidance

²⁵ Shannon Wilhite & Lyndal M. Bullock (2012) Effects of the WhyTry social skills program on students with emotional and/or behavioral problems in an alternative school, *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 17:2, April 2012.

²⁶ <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/EvidenceSnapshot/78>

²⁷ https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/WWC_Talent_Search_122806.pdf

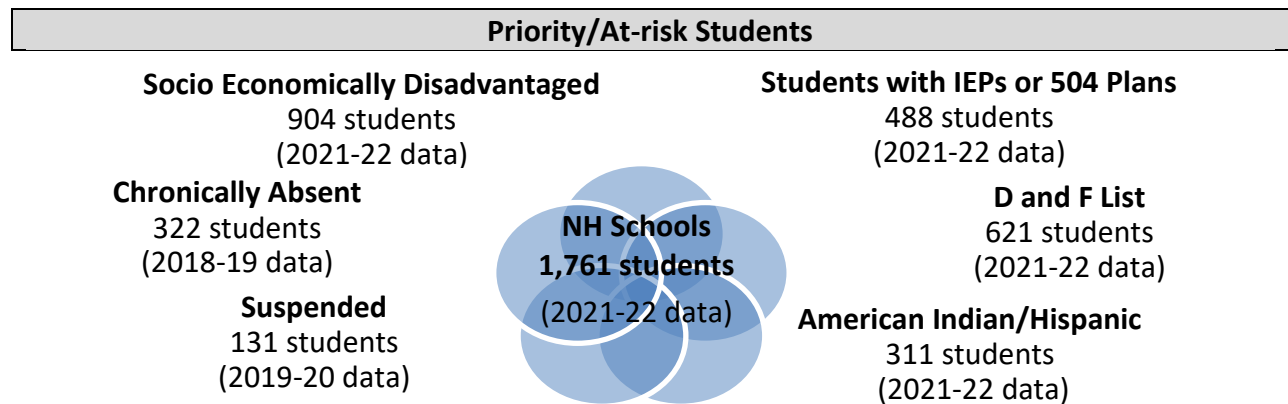
²⁸ <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/EvidenceSnapshot/671>

class through our local community college. General Studies 7, My Future, My Plan will be integrated into students Tech/Health classes with additional support in Study Skills. Thus, all Acorn students will end Gr. 9 already enrolled in our nearby community college.

High Quality Career Technical Education Pathways: Acorn encourages enrollment in hands-on CTE classes from NH’s seven CTE pathways.²⁹ A May 2021 REL Midwest report found, “CTE concentrators [students who complete a CTE pathway] were 7 percentage points more likely than non-concentrators to graduate from high school on time and 10 percentage points more likely to enroll in any type of postsecondary education within two years of their expected high school graduation year.”³⁰ Proposed Acorn director [REDACTED], while trained in English and history, is NH CTE director and will ensure alignment with NH’s Career Tech opportunities.

(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs. (15 points)

Priority Students: The chart illustrates at-risk student groups from whom staff will identify priority students. Students who are in more than one group will be identified for added support.



Approach to identifying students: We will work with the 12 K-8 districts sending students to NH to identify incoming 9th graders experiencing barriers to learning. An administrator and counselor, ICs and Acorn teachers will work with the appropriate K-8 schools to identify, interview (student and family) and enroll incoming 9th graders. The identification and interview process was piloted in the spring 2021 and 2021-22 pilot but will be formalized for the project.

Rising 9th graders will be identified using the following criteria: (a) low grades/failing classes, (b) chronic absenteeism, (c) any suspension, and/or 3+ office referrals, (d) socio-economic

²⁹ NH CTE Pathways: Agriculture and Natural Resources; Art Media and Entertainment; Building & Construction Trades; Hospitality, Tourism & Recreation; Information Technology; Manufacturing; Transportation.

³⁰ Brodersen, R. M., Gagnon, D., Liu, J., & Tedeschi, S. (2021). The impact of career and technical education on postsecondary outcomes in Nebraska and South Dakota (REL 2021–087). U.S. Dept. of Ed., IES, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, REL Central. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>

status, or (e) being American Indian/ Hispanic **combined with** one or more of criteria a, b or c. Living in a low-income household, being American Indian or Hispanic by itself **absolutely does not** qualify a student for Acorn. Only students who struggle in grades 7-8 will be eligible.

Identifying 10th graders will be done by the high schools in spring of Gr. 9 based upon the same criteria described above. Based on the pilot we expect up to 60% of Acorn freshmen will need Acorn in Gr. 10. Thus, if five or six students (40%) per Gr. 9 classroom “graduate” and we slightly increase Gr. 10 classes to 18 – 20 students, each site will be able to enroll 8 – 10 new sophomores who struggled in the comprehensive school in Gr. 9 but were not served by Acorn.

Continuing monitoring and support: Students who “graduate” from the Gr. 9 Acorn classrooms and transition into General Ed for Gr. 10 will still be monitored and receive extra needed support from the ICs and other staff. We reserve the option to bring them back to the Gr. 10 class (even if just for one class period of Gr. 10 Study Skills). When Acorn 10th graders transition to Gr. 11 and then Gr. 12, they will continue to be monitored. Those who still need support will enroll in study skills classes, and receive tutoring and extra supports through the MTSS.

CPP1: Promoting Equity & Adequacy in Student Access to Education Resources & Opportunities

Based on the spring 2021 and 2021-22 pilot nearly all Acorn students will be members of one or more of the priority groups. Keeping at-risk students in the comprehensive schools connects them with opportunities, supports and high-achieving peers (as measured by school success). The \$3,290 yearly difference in earnings between comprehensive and alternative education graduates is substantial. But it greatly understates how Acorn will promote equity and opportunity. Far fewer than 10% of NH continuation high graduates earn a two- or four-year college degree or complete a certificate program in community college versus over 50% of graduates from Arcata, McKinleyville and Six Rivers. **Staying at the comprehensive schools increases students’ odds of earning a post-secondary degree or certificate/training program by over 5x.**

We stipulate college and career readiness is complex, especially for first generation rural students experiencing poverty. But, it is indisputable almost no students in alternative schools (where few or no classes are college prep and where CTE classes are not part of an organized career pathway) are college and career ready. Acorn can change this.

Research Behind the Acorn Project Design

Acorn’s design is informed by a multi-year review of relevant literature and implementation guides (including two from the What Works Clearinghouse).

Using data to improve student outcomes and reduce the dropout rate: Acorn through its alignment with the district MTSS integrates five recommendations from the 2008 *IES Practice Guide on Dropout Prevention* and three recommendations from the 2009 IES Practice Guide *Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making*.

Program components alignment with the <i>Practice Guide on Dropout Prevention</i>	
PG Recommendation	Program Component
(1) using data to identify students needing help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify students not earning a 2.0+ GPA with 90% attendance receive additional support. • Tier 3: Enroll at-risk Gr. 9-10 students in TLC
(2) assigning at-risk students adult advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 2: Check & Connect with teachers and staff • Tier 3: TSL teachers and Behavior Support Aids will support assigned students.
(3) providing additional, focused academic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 1: Implement Universal Design for Learning • Tiers 2 and 3: Small group academic interventions for students in Acorn classrooms
(4) support to improve classroom behavior and social skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiers 1 and 2: Implementation of PBIS and WhyTry • Tiers 2 and 3: Counseling support for struggling students in and out of the Acorn/TLC classrooms
(5) personalizing the learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiers 1 and 2: UDL • Tier 1: Trauma-informed PD for teachers • Tiers 2 and 3: Differentiated instruction in TSL classes

Program components alignment with the <i>Practice Guide on Data Use</i>	
PG Recommendation	Program Component
(1) make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 1: Develop and implement common assessments across all curricular areas to guide student and educator interventions • Tier 2: Use data to guide small group academic interventions
(2) establish a clear vision for schoolwide data use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiers 1 & 2: Teams use data to guide instruction and interventions • Tier 3: TLC teachers, Behavior Support Aids and Tier 3 Team will determine appropriate student interventions and supports.
(3) develop and maintain a data system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 1: Principals share and explain Acorn data quarterly • Tiers 2 & 3: Data is used to guide data-driven PD and academic interventions for struggling students

CPP 2: Innovative Approaches to Addressing the Impact of COVID-19

Acorn also addresses CPP 2: Addressing COVID-19’s Impacts in at least 10 of the CPP’s innovative approaches including: family and stakeholder collaboration, levels of support by teachers and other school and community staff as part of the district’s MTSS, engaging instruction using UDL, intensive and focused PD for staff, and tutoring and extra support for students.

The likelihood the proposed project will result in lasting change

Northern Humboldt has extensive experience managing and evaluating school initiatives. Through this we identified four key predictors likely to produce change and improvement:

- (1) Level of school and district administrator support. When administrators **fully support and**

understand a program they build consensus and support with faculty and staff. In planning meetings all administrators supported Acorn and committed to the weekly site meetings.

(2) Programs implemented with fidelity result in improved student learning and success. Since a 2010 i3 grant [REDACTED], the proposed Acorn director, has developed Fidelity Matrices to measure program component's implementation level. In all cases, high fidelity programs achieved and usually exceeded the goals. Acorn's design is informed by these successful examples.

(3) High level of teacher and staff support with job embedded, personalized ongoing PD: Acorn will provide extensive and ongoing teacher (and administrator) support. The two Instructional Coaches will work closely with the TLC teachers and site admin and counselors to support teacher and student success in the Acorn classrooms and after in Gr. 11-12.

(4) **Planning to sustain the program from the start:** When fully implemented in August 2023 Acorn will serve 45-50 freshmen and 40-50 sophomores per year. Over five years Acorn will serve approximately 500 highly at-risk students. If Acorn is as impactful as the pilot suggests, over 400 students will remain at the comprehensive high schools where they have the opportunity to learn skills and make connections that will help them the rest of their lives.

At first glance, Acorn costs approximately \$8,000 per student served and \$10,000 per comprehensive school graduate. However, once Acorn is built it will sustain itself by keeping students enrolled and succeeding in high school. As described below, Acorn's alignment with local and state funding mechanisms makes it a potential national model for replication.

Sustaining the program

California's Local Control Funding Formula and Local Control Accountability Plan

In 2015 California switched to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) which requires a formal process involving parents and community and a review of student achievement data. Districts must use that process to determine what programs/ initiatives to support. Student success is a central goal in NH's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP).

Goal 1: Effective, engaging and rigorous academic instruction and support for all students:

- A(5) Differentiated Instruction with a focus on Universal Design for Learning
- E(8) Increase the number of students enrolled in A-G [college preparatory] courses.

Goal 2: Inclusive social, emotional, and behavior instruction for all students

- C(9): Discipline policy reflects a restorative mindset using trauma informed strategies
- D(11). Provide universal social/emotional supports and interventions district wide

including classroom implementation

LCFF offers an historic opportunity to set locally-driven priorities to improve outcomes for underserved students in our rural schools. LCAPs are updated yearly to set funding priorities for the next year. Once in the LCAP the work done by this grant will be sustained and supported.

Potential Increased Revenue from Acorn Implementation
Increased enrollment by keeping students enrolled at AHS, MHS and 6RCHS: 28 of 45 students per grade x 4 years = 112 students x \$11,500 baseline state funding = \$ 1,288,000 yearly

The over \$1,000,000 in added yearly revenue is enough to maintain the TLC classes and ICs.

Sustainability Planning Group

Starting in 2023 Mr. [REDACTED] will convene a team to discuss and develop sustainability plans to sustain staff and interventions beyond EIR funding through other funding including the Local Control Funding Formula. Additionally, program aspects can be supported using Title I and Title IV funds and foundation support from locally active funders like the Humboldt Area Foundation. The team will finalize the plan by April 2024, and begin to implement it by December 2024.

(2) Extent goals, objectives, and outcomes. . . are clearly specified and measurable. (5 points)

Acorn Project Goals and Measures

To determine the target population’s needs we conducted a needs analysis that included:

Type of data
1. identification of current multi-tiered behavior components in the project schools.
2. collection and review of school level and subgroup level student data.
3. student school environment surveys, family and staff surveys.

This data was reviewed in MTSS and planning meetings and has guided the proposal’s development. While not required in the RFA, Goal 4 is to sustain the program beyond federal funding.

Goal 1 measures Acorn’s core mission: keeping students at the comprehensive schools.

Goal 1: 80% of Acorn Students Graduate Comprehensive Schools College & Career Ready					
Performance Measure	Yr. 1	Yr. 2	Yr. 3	Yr. 4	Yr. 5
Students transition successfully to high school. ³¹					
1.1: Improve Acorn student attendance to at or above state levels	--	87.5%	89%	90.5%	92%
1.2: 93% of Acorn students pass Gr. 9 & 10 classes (including Gr. 9-10 English & Math) and earn 110 credits by the end of Gr. 10.	--	86%	90%	93%	93%
1.3: 75 Gr. 9 & 10 students to be supported through TLC classes	15	75	75	75	75
Increase overall comprehensive high school overall retention rate from 70% to 85%					
1.4: 80% retention rate by Acorn cohort (i.e. Class of 2025, 2026)	--	--	70%	80%	80%

³¹ *Why Students Drop Out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research*, Russell Rumberger and Sun Ah Lim, 2008. *Transition from Elementary to Middle School: Strategies for Educators*, Niesen Ed.D. and Weise Ph.D., 2004.

Note: the class of 2027 will be the first to benefit from Acorn starting Gr. 9

Goal 2: In our rural area to meaningfully impact students and families we must integrate services and supports. This goal reflects the need to align services from multiple organizations.

Goal 2: Develop Integrated Student Supports to Serve Acorn Students and Alumni					
Performance Measure	Yr. 1	Yr. 2	Yr. 3	Yr. 4	Yr. 5
2.1: Align school and community supports for students. Measured by the Los Angeles COE Community Schools 10 pt. Rubric.	3/10		5/10		8/10
2.2: 90% of students in need of Tiers 2&3 support receive school & community mental health counseling from licensed clinicians.	65%		75%		90%
2.3: Arrange mentoring for 90% of eligible Acorn students through Tribes, Talent Search, Upward Bound and other organizations	75% of students		90% of students		
2.4: Provide college and career counseling for all students	100% of Acorn students				
2.5: Provide job training and career counseling for students	100% of Acorn students				

Goal 3 focuses on the key role both the Acorn classroom teachers and the general teaching staff play in student success – which includes successfully staying in the comprehensive schools.

Goal 3: Prepare teachers and staff to teach and support Acorn and Priority Students					
Performance Measure	Yr. 1	Yr. 2	Yr. 3	Yr. 4	Yr. 5
3.1, 3.2 & 3.3: All district teachers become prepared to effectively teach at-risk students to ensure they are prepared to support Acorn students taking classes outside of the TLC-style classrooms. Note: All TLC-style classroom teachers will be prepared in UDL, Trauma Informed and YMHFA.					
3.1: 90% of all teachers are trained in academic Tier 1 Universal Design for Learning	50%	70%	90%	90%	90%
3.2: 90% of all teachers are trained in Trauma Informed instruction in the classroom practices	60%	70%	80%	90%	90%
3.3: 90% of all teachers trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid	30%	50%	75%	90%	90%
Acorn teachers are prepared to effectively instruct and support at-risk students in the program					
3.4: Acorn teachers & ICs implement UDL with fidelity in all classes	60%		80%		100%
3.5: Acorn teachers & ICs facilitate additional supports for all students	75%	90%	100% of students		

By Year 5 NH will fund three of the five Acorn classrooms.

Goal 4: Sustain the program beyond Federal funding			
Performance Measure			
4.1: Develop and implement a sustainability plan for key program components.	Year 1 Begin planning	Year 2 Plan finalized	Year 3 Begin implementation
4.2: District funds an increasing share of Acorn classrooms (teachers and ICs) using non-EIR funds	Yr. 3 NH funds 1x tchr.	Yr. 4 NH funds 2x tchr.	Y. 5 NH funds 2x tchr. + 1x IC

C. Quality of Project Personnel (10 points)

Extent applicant encourages applications from traditionally underrepresented groups.

NH encourages applications for employment from members of groups traditionally under-represented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. The district partners closely with the Yurok Tribe, Blue Lake Rancheria and Northern California Indian Development

Council through multiple US Ed grants that promote the hiring of Tribal members.

NH recognizes the importance of searching, recruiting and hiring qualified applicants from traditionally underrepresented groups –particularly for a program like Acorn where many if not most students and families will be members of traditionally underrepresented groups. Members of these groups will be sought out for the certificated (teachers, ICs, Behaviorist) and classified (BSA) positions. The hiring qualifications will stress a strong understanding of and experience working with students and communities of traditionally underrepresented groups including demonstrated abilities working with members of these groups to the greatest extent possible.

Key Project Personnel: In addition, the Secretary considers the qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel.

Project Director: [REDACTED] is a 6x federal grant director has directed, evaluated or supported 75+ federal, state and foundation projects including a 2010 i3 and 2019 EIR grant, 2019 School Climate Grant and NH’s Homeless, Foster, Indian Education, and CTE programs. Since 2017 he has led local MTSS efforts to bring physical and mental health services to schools, serves on the County Mental Health Triage Grant leadership team and works closely with local partners serving at risk students. And noted, he started and taught in the spring 2021 Acorn pilot.

His duties include managing fiscal and contracts, working with the US Dept. of Education program officer and supervising Acorn staff. The 0.4 FTE assignment (80 days per year) plus the 80 days on the School Climate Grant will allow him time to work directly with the 2x ICs, 5x TSL classes and plan and support PD including working closely with [REDACTED], the MTSS and SCTG coordinator. He will work closely with the principals and site teams to ensure Acorn serves the students and collaborates with existing resources. If funded, Mr. [REDACTED] non-MTSS and school-climate related duties will be adjusted to free up time to support the project.

MTSS/SCTG Grant Coordinator: [REDACTED] will work closely with Mr. [REDACTED] ICs and TSL teachers to align the 2019 School Climate Transformation Grant (focusing on socio-emotional, behavioral and academic MTSS) with Acorn and its focus on academic interventions and student success. She is the long-time chair of the district MTSS committee. Her participation will help ensure Acorn aligns with district initiatives. Her support is a match.

Instructional Coaches: Two ICs will support the Acorn classrooms on their site and monitor and arrange support for Acorn alumni in Gr. 10-12. The ICs will provide in-class coaching to support the implementation with fidelity of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 strategies. They will support the

Acorn teachers and other staff to ensure appropriate interventions are being implemented to support the students. ICs will observe, support and co-teach in each Acorn classroom at least 50x a year. To be considered as an IC an applicant must have a demonstrated history of successfully working with at-risk students and active participation in the district and school MTSS.

Acorn teachers: 5x teachers will be selected. As noted, one teacher successfully taught the MHS class in spring 2021 and 2021-22. If funded, she will restart one model Acorn classroom in January 2023. Four more teachers will be selected by March 2023 to begin teaching in August 2023. During spring 2023, along with the ICs they will observe the MHS class and begin PD.

Evaluation Team: Principal Investigator Dr. [REDACTED] is Assistant to the Dean of Education at Wayne State College and retired Dean of the Educational Leadership program at the University of South Dakota. He will lead the review of the project (including developing surveys and evaluation documents). As PI he is responsible for assuring compliance with applicable IRB policies and procedures, US Dept of Education regulations, oversight of the research study and the informed consent process. Though he will delegate tasks to members of the evaluation team, he retains ultimate responsibility for the study's conduct and certifies information provided is true and complete and the proposal conforms to University policies and procedures. Dr. [REDACTED] and Mr. [REDACTED] are the evaluators for a 2019 EIR grant.

Humboldt Based Evaluators: [REDACTED] Ed.D. and [REDACTED] will support the evaluation. Dr. [REDACTED] has conducted over 500 classroom observations for US Dept. of Education and California Department of Education grants directed and/or evaluated by the other team members. He will conduct 200 annual Acorn classroom observations and 100 of control classrooms. [REDACTED] retired Del Norte County Assistant Superintendent has directed or evaluated many federal, state and foundation grants including a 2010 i3 grant. He will collect student data, evaluate PD activities and collaborate with Drs. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to measure progress and prepare reports.

D. Quality of the Management Plan (10 Points)

Quality of management plan to achieve project objectives on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for project tasks. (10 points)

Acorn requires leadership, fiscal oversight, clear responsibilities, regular site input and a system to support and monitor staff and student success. NH has extensive experience managing successful US Ed. grants which makes us confident of achieving goals and objectives on time and on budget. The management plan will continue protocols developed for prior grants and projects. Each team member has clearly defined responsibilities which will help them collaborate.

The plan includes strong coordination between participants, clearly delineated activities and comprehensive procedures for evaluation and stakeholder feedback. The Director, ICs, teachers and evaluators will implement a systematic, MTSS aligned data collection system. The evaluators and Mr. [REDACTED] will develop the Fidelity Matrix to measure progress towards benchmarks. Site-level and project-wide data reports will be reviewed in the monthly Leadership Team (LT) meetings. An Advisory Committee (AC) that includes parents and stakeholders will review implementation quarterly, help the LT make mid-course corrections, and focus on sustainability.

Leadership Team:
[REDACTED], Project Director; [REDACTED], NH School Climate Grant Coordinator; 2x Principals or Assistant Principals; [REDACTED], NH American Indian Coordinator; 5x Acorn Teachers and 2x Instructional Coaches; [REDACTED], Evaluator

The **Leadership Team** will meet monthly to guide the program, review school and other data and measure progress using goals, objectives and implementation timelines. LT meetings are the platform from which to guide program implementation and continuous improvement. LT meetings will provide time to address the data from the evaluation and other feedback. The team and sites will implement a systematic data collection system to guide and monitor progress.

Advisory Committee
[REDACTED], Deputy Branch Director, Children & Family Services, Humboldt County Mental Health; [REDACTED], Two Feathers, Native American Family Services; [REDACTED] Education Director, Blue Lake Rancheria; 4x Acorn parents

The Advisory Committee will meet quarterly to: (a) review progress, (b) how student and family needs are being addressed, and (c) identify how partners and schools can collaborate.

Site level parent and student committees
Site principals and assistant principals (for AHS and MHS only); project director; TLC classroom teachers; at least 2x paraprofessionals from TLC classrooms; 4x site parents; and 4x Acorn students

Each site will establish a site level parent and student committee to give feedback 3x a year from the perspective of students and families who are ideally suited to report how student needs are being addressed – or are not being addressed—and bring attention to areas of need.

Sharing our findings: The LT and advisory team will review evidence of progress or gaps to make continuous and iterative improvements in project design and implementation and assess attainment of the performance measures. Results will be shared with partner organizations for dissemination and publication on their websites and in district publications, presentations, and on

the district website. NH already partners with the California Department of Education’s Coordinated School Health Office, California Small School Districts Association and the CA Rural Ed Network. Cal Poly Humboldt School of Education professors working with Acorn staff, teachers and administrators will look to develop research and reports and the budget will support their presenting at state wide, other regional and national conferences.

Project Management Timeline

The Management Timeline will be expanded as Acorn is implemented. These tables show tasks that need be completed in 2022-23 to successfully launch Acorn and Years 2-5 Milestones.

Note: as the EIR program year is January 1 to December 30, the federal fiscal year is October 1 to September 30, and school years begin July 1 and end June 30 there is some overlap in dates.

Year 1 (2023 calendar year) Milestones Responsible parties listed in parenthesis	Due Date
Reassign Director, begin hiring process for ICs, TLC teachers and BSAs (NH)	Dec. 2022
Acorn Spring 2023 pilot classroom teacher reassigned (Project Director [PD])	
Review PD plan with administration and district (PD, MTSS Lead [MTSS])	January 2023
Begin Gr. 9 Acorn pilot classroom at McKinleyville High (PD, MHS Principal)	
Advisory Committee meets (quarterly thereafter) (PD, MTSS)	
Site Committees begin meeting (quarterly thereafter) (PD, MTSS)	March 23
Select/hire additional TSL staff for 2022-23 school year (PD, MTSS, Principals)	May 2023
Complete 200 baseline student engagement/classroom observations (Eval)	
Develop & approve 2023-24 Management Timeline (PD, MTSS, LT)	
Tier 2 & 3 behavioral & academic supports delivered to 15 pilot students (PD, MTSS)	June 2023
Finalize 2023-24 Schoolyear Management Plan (PD, MTSS, LT)	
Hold summer Professional Development for new hires (PD, MTSS, LT)	Summer
All 5 TLC classrooms begin/are in place (PD, MTSS, LT)	Aug. 2023
Sustainability Team begins meeting (PD, Community Partners [CP])	Dec. 2023

Acorn Management Plan Year One Timeline		
Activity	Responsibility	Time Frame
██████ reassigned. Leadership Team (LT) meets for first time. Needed contracts prepared.	LT, Business Office, PD	Within 45 days of Project Award
Reassign MHS Pilot Classroom Teacher		
Meet with site admin and teachers to review grant	PD, PC, Supe.	60 days after project award
Finalize Contractual agreements	PD, Bus.	
Yr. 1 management plan reviewed and finalized	PD, LT, Site Admin	
Faculty, staff surveys in participating schools		
Fidelity Matrix prepared and reviewed	LT, PD, Evaluators	
Begin hiring of 2x ICs, 4x TLC Teachers, 4x BSAs	PD, MTSS, Admin.	
Develop Year One PD plan/Schedule for Acorn staff		
Prepare Yr. 1 Eval Plan, Logic Model & PIFM	Evaluators, LT	
Eval/LT meet to review eval plan, LM and FM	LT, ICs	

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Finalize Spring 2023 PD schedule and topics	PD, ICs, District	
Staff start working in Acorn TLC classroom	PD, Principals	January 2023
Advisory Committee meets (quarterly thereafter)	LT, PD, ICs	
Site Teams begin meeting (quarterly thereafter)	Principals, PD, ICs	
Pilot PLC and MHS begins meeting	LT, Principal, ICs	
In-class coaching and support in limited classrooms	ICs	
Finalize hiring of 2x ICs, 4x TLC Teachers, 4x BSAs	LT, Principals	February – April 2023
Hold PD Day for new hires	LT, ICs, Site	
Tier 2 interventions piloted (i.e. Check & Connect)	Admin, teachers	
Work with K-8s to identify 2023-24 Gr. 9 students	PD, ICs, Admin.	
Complete 200 baseline classroom observations	PD, ICs, Principals, Evaluators	May-June 2023
Finalize collection of baseline student & school data		
Review progress to date using benchmarks & FIDM	LT, District and Site	
Finalize training plan including summer/August PD	Administrators, ICs,	
Plan for 2023-24 school year including PD Days		Summer 2023
Summer/Before School PD (2-3 days)		
Finalize 2023-24 school year plan		
Acorn classrooms #2-5 begin	PD, ICs, Teachers,	August 2023
Begin planning for Year One AYR	PD, Evaluator	

Year 2 Milestones	Due Date
5x TLC classrooms begin/are in place for 2023-24 school year (PD, NH)	Aug. 30, 2023
Leadership, Advisory and Site Teams continue meeting (PD, LT)	Ongoing
Targeted PD and in-class coaching and support continue (PD, MTSS, LT)	
Sustainability Team begins meeting (PD)	Dec. 2023
Finalize Yr. 2 Program Fidelity Matrix (Evaluators, LT)	January 2024
File Annual Yearly Report (PD, Evaluators)	February 2024
Complete 300 student engagement/classroom observations (Evaluators)	May 2024
Tiers 2 & 3 behavioral & academic supports delivered to 75 students (PD, MTSS, LT)	June 2024
Finalize 2024-25 Schoolyear Plan (LT, NH, Evaluators)	June-August 2024
Hold summer Professional Development (PD, MTSS, NH)	
All 5 TLC classrooms continue (PD, NH)	Aug. 30, 2024
Sustainability Plan is finalized (PD)	Dec. 2024
File Annual Yearly Report (PD, Evaluators)	January 2025

Year 3 Milestones	Due Date
Complete hiring of additional staff for 2024-25 school year (PD, NH)	Aug. 1, 2024
5 TLC classrooms continue for 2024-25 school year (PD, NH)	Aug. 30, 2024
NH begins to fund 1x Acorn teacher (NH)	
Leadership, Advisory and Site Teams continue meeting (PD, MTSS, LT)	Ongoing
Targeted PD and in-class coaching and support continue (PD, MTSS, LT)	
Finalize Yr. 3 Program Fidelity Matrix (PD, Evaluators)	January 2025
File Annual Yearly Report (PD, Evaluators)	February 2025
Complete 300 student engagement/classroom observations (Evaluators)	May 2025
Tiers 2 and 3 behavioral & academic supports delivered to 100 students (PD,	June 2025

MTSS, LT)	
Finalize 2025-26 Schoolyear Plan (LT, NH, Evaluators)	June-Aug. 2025
Hold summer Professional Development (PD, MTSS, NH)	
All 5 TLC classrooms begin/are in place for 2025-26 (PD, NH)	Aug. 30, 2025
NH begins to fund 1x Acorn teacher (NH)	
Year 4 Milestones	Due Date
Complete hiring of additional staff for 2025-26 school year (PD, NH)	Aug.1, 2025
5 TLC classrooms continue for 2025-26 school year (PD, NH)	August 30, 2025
NH begins to fund 2x Acorn teacher and 1x Instructional Coach (NH)	
Leadership, Advisory and Site Teams continue meeting (PD, MTSS, LT)	Ongoing
Targeted PD and in-class coaching and support continue (PD, MTSS, LT)	
Finalize Yr. 4 Program Fidelity Matrix (PD, Evaluators)	January 2026
File Annual Yearly Report (PD, Evaluators)	February 2026
Complete 300 student engagement/classroom observations (Evaluators)	May 2026
Tiers 2 and 3 behavioral & academic supports delivered to 100 students (PD, MTSS, LT)	June 2026
Finalize 2026-27 SY Plan (LT, NH, Evaluators)	June-August 2026
Hold summer Professional Development (PD, MTSS, NH)	
All 5 TLC classrooms begin/are in place for 2026-27 (PD, NH)	August 30, 2026
NH begins to fund 2x Acorn teachers (NH)	
Year 5 (2027 calendar year) Milestones	Due Date
Complete hiring of additional staff for 2026-27 school year (PD, NH)	Aug. 1, 2026
5 TLC classrooms continue for 2026-27 school year (PD, NH)	Aug. 30, 2026
NH begins to fund 2x Acorn teachers and 1x Instructional Coach (NH)	
Leadership, Advisory and Site Teams continue meeting (PD, MTSS, LT)	Ongoing
Targeted PD and in-class coaching and support continue (PD, MTSS, LT)	
Finalize Yr. 5 Program Fidelity Matrix (PD, Evaluators)	January 2027
File Annual Yearly Report (PD, Evaluators)	February 2027
Complete 300 student engagement/classroom observations (Evaluators)	May 2027
Tiers 2 and 3 behavioral & academic supports delivered to 100 students (PD, MTSS, LT)	June 2027
Finalize 2027-28 SY Plan (LT, NH, Evaluators)	June-August 2027
Hold summer Professional Development (PD, MTSS, LT)	
All 5 TLC classrooms remain in place for 2027-28 using local funding (NH)	August 30, 2027
NH begins to fund 5x Acorn teachers and 2x Instructional Coaches (NH)	
Evaluators collect 2025-26 student and program data for Final Report (Eval)	Autumn 2027
Prepare final report (PD, Evaluators)	Jan – Mar. 25
Submit Final Report (PD)	Mar. 30, 2025

Ensuring feedback and continuous improvement: Feedback and progress monitoring are reasonably easy to plan and describe but not to do. By integrating Acorn into the MTSS it will become an established part of how the comprehensive schools support at-risk 9th and 10th graders. The ICs, TLC teachers, site admin and counselors must prioritize the weekly student monitoring meetings. These meetings, site and MTSS meetings described earlier are critical to

the project's success because one teacher or one counselor can't do it all by themselves. It is only by collaborating with school, community and family partners that students will thrive.

E. Quality of the Project Evaluation (30 Points)

(1) Extent evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about project's effectiveness to meet the WWC standards with or without reservations. (20 points)

Acorn will meet WWC Group Design Standards with Reservations by a Quasi-experimental design. It will establish baseline equivalence of treatment and comparison groups—made easier because all schools are in one district and baseline data are available. Evaluators will collect student incoming 9th graders data to measure their rate of staying at the comprehensive schools—including attendance and credits earned college and career readiness. Individual student data will include: gender, Socio-Economic Status, ethnicity, SPED status, Foster, and Homeless status.

The program evaluation will be guided by three program evaluation questions derived from a model developed by Gajda and Jewiss at the University of Vermont in 2004³²: (1) What are the *desired outcomes* of this program? What are the goals? What are we trying to accomplish within the next month/quarter/year(s)? (2) How will we get there? What *activities* will enable us to reach our outcomes? (3) What will *indicate* that we are making progress toward the desired outcomes?

Impact Study on the Effect of Implementation of the Acorn Model

The evaluation includes an impact study on the effect of exposure to Acorn on student outcomes related to at-risk students' success in remaining in the comprehensive high school until graduation. Success will be determined through improved student attendance, reduced chronic absenteeism, successful college and career readiness as measured by the number of units earned at the end of each schoolyear (including A-G classes and CTE pathway classes completed).

In addition to measuring the success of the treatment group itself, a comparison group will serve as a control to determine the differential effects of the treatment when compared to a similar group of students who have not been exposed to Acorn program. The comparison group will be selected for their similarities to the target group to distinguish the actual effects of the treatment on the target students.

The study will be a Quasi-Experimental Design (QED) in which outcomes of students receiving the Acorn program are compared to outcomes of students in the same schools not receiving Acorn. Approximately 90 incoming 9th grade students to the two comprehensive high

³² Rebecca Gajda and Jennifer Jewiss, "Thinking about How to Evaluate Your Program? These Strategies Will Get You Started," *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 9, no. 8 (2004).

schools will be identified by district and program staff in beginning of the school year. These students will be non-randomly assigned to either participate in the Acorn program or to receive business as usual support. About 30 students will participate in Acorn in two Arcata High classrooms and another 15 students in one Acorn classroom at McKinleyville High.

Students will be selected into either the Acorn or comparison group in order to achieve balance on baseline characteristics of 8th grade attendance, 8th grade GPA, and general demographic characteristics. The non-random selection process will also consider additional demographic characteristics of the students (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) and recommendations from parents and teachers. Once the students are selected for the treatment and comparison groups and before the program start, Dr. [REDACTED] will confirm the equivalence of the samples at baseline by using the structure of the hierarchical linear regression model described below, but with the 8th grade attendance and GPA as the dependent variable. If the two groups do not have baseline equivalence on the two key baseline variables of attendance and GPA, adjustments will be made to the selection in order to achieve baseline balance.

Effects will be estimated by a single level linear regression model with dependent variables of attendance and credit acquisition. Outcomes in Years One, Two, and Three will be considered exploratory, and outcomes in Years Four and Five are confirmatory. The model is designed to control for the following co-variates: Gr. 8 student attendance and credit acquisition, student gender, socio-economic status, student race/ethnicity, SPED status, Foster, and Homeless status.

We will explore the treatment's effect on student outcomes after one year of the program (based upon change from baseline), look to confirm a small positive effect in student outcomes after two years, and look to confirm a moderate positive effect after three and four years.

The Linear Regression Model

$$\text{Where: } Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(T_{ij}) + \beta_2(Y^*_{ij}) + \sum_{j=1}^{J-1} \beta_{3,j}Sch_j + \sum_{m=1}^M \beta_{4,m}X_{mij} + \varepsilon_i$$

Y_{ij} = the student outcome (either days attended or credits acquired)

β_1 = the treatment effect

T_{ij} = 1 if student i is selected to the treatment in school j , and 0 if comparison;

β_2 = the effect of baseline variable

Y^*_{ij} is the baseline value of the outcome for student i in school j ;

β_3 = the effect of school

Sch_j = 1 if student is in school j , = 0 else,

β_4 = the effects of student demographic covariates

The parameter β_1 indicates the impact of the Acorn program on the outcome, Y_{ij} . When testing multiple confirmatory contrasts in the same domain, we will apply a Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment. A positive and statistically significant estimate of β_1 will indicate that there is evidence that the Acorn program had a positive effect on the outcome.

This model accounts for the blocking of students within school for selection to either the treatment or comparison group.

The evaluation aligns with practices and strategies the evaluators have used successfully in US Dept. of Education programs. It aligns with the evaluation of the 2019 EIR grant Dr. [REDACTED] and Mr. [REDACTED] evaluate which the EIR Evaluation TA Team found “Our assessment of the highest potential WWC rating for your evaluation, as currently planned, is: Meets WWC Standards with Reservations.” (Please see Appendix J for full memo). This adherence to best practices and successful experience make it suitable for replication or testing in other settings.

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| (2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. (5 points) |
| (3) Extent evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation. (5 points) |

Within 90 days of award the evaluators will develop a Program Implementation Fidelity Matrix (PIFM). The PIFM is a progress measure tool that (1) takes each goal and bench- mark, (2) determines each goal’s short-, mid-, and long-term targets, (3) list the level of achievement to meet the target, (4) assigns each target a point value, and (5) using the sum of the target scores measures progress toward meeting the goal or benchmark. The evaluators and Mr. [REDACTED] will develop a PIFM (a 40+ hour task) for regular review to determine Acorn’s implementation level. They have been trained in the i3 and EIR Fidelity Matrix processes and developed the PIFM tool and methodology based on that experience and have now used it in ten different US Ed. grants.

Example Program Implementation Fidelity Matrix (PIFM)			Met/ Achieved (2 pts)	Partially Met/ In Progress (1 pt)	Not Met/ Not yet attempted (0 pt)
School/Classroom Level Subsection	Timeline	Responsible Parties			
Example Review date: February 2022					
Two additional Acorn Teachers selected	Dec. ‘21	PD, NH	x		
Instructional Coaches selected and reassigned	Dec. ‘21		x		
2x new teachers and 2x ICs push into classrooms	Jan. ‘22	PD, ICs, Tchrs.	x		
BCBA begins working with teachers and ICs	Feb. ‘22	BCBA, Tch. ICs		x	
Behavioral support plans implemented for 10 students	Mar. ‘22				x

Site teams review student progress with LT	Mar. '21	Teams, LT.			x
Overall Progress Towards Meeting Goal:			x / # of measures x 2 pts.		
Overall Weight: (How much does this section count towards the overall project implementation score of 100/100). Example = 20 pts			x/20		

The PIFM will include program-wide, staff-specific, and school-level subsections. Each will be given an overall weight which totals 100 points. **An overall score of 85/100 will be the measurable threshold for acceptable program implementation.**

As described, the evaluators will collect student and implementation data. The PIFM (project implementation) combined with individual student progress will provide ongoing assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. The evaluation will assess project goals and measurable objectives. While each goal has measurable objectives, in the event of funding, these will be more closely examined by the LT, Advisory Group and finalized in early 2023.