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**Project Leveraging Employee Advancement to Develop Excellence and Reach Success****Introduction**

The Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) is the **largest** school system in North Carolina and the **15th largest district in the nation**. WCPSS covers twelve municipalities, 864 square miles, and is comprised of 198 schools, including 119 elementary, 38 middle, 31 high, seven alternative schools, one K-8 academy, and two leadership academies for grades 6-12. Wake County is the most populous county in the state (growing by 62 people/day) with an estimated population of **1,175,021** (U.S. Census Quick Facts, 2022). Raleigh (the largest city in Wake) is the county seat and the state capital. WCPSS is centrally located to Research Triangle Park (RTP), the world's largest research park and collaborative innovation center, and a combination of colleges and research universities (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, Duke University, North Carolina Central University, St. Augustine's University, Shaw University, William Peace University, and Meredith College). U.S. tech giants (e.g., Meta, Amazon, Google, and SAS Institute) identify the Triangle area (Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill) as a hub for talent and future growth (Eanes, 2022).

WCPSS is home to an excellent and highly qualified cadre of educators and employs approximately 20,096 personnel, including 10,985 teachers, and enrolls over 158,000 students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. **For 16 years, the district has consistently ranked among the nation's highest number of National Board-certified teachers (NBCTs).** More than **3,000 teachers** have achieved this milestone while working at WCPSS.

Despite these great strengths and successes, there are several recurring high-need and low-performing schools in the district. The Teacher and School Leader (TSL) grant program provides an excellent and unique opportunity to bring unprecedented resources supporting innovative

human capital management and performance-based compensation reforms designed to ensure students enrolled in these schools have access to high-quality educational opportunities.

To address these challenges, WCPSS will implement Project LEADERS (**Leveraging Employee Advancement to Develop Excellence and Reach Success**) to enhance its human capital management system (HCMS) and implement a performance-based compensation system (PBCS) to recruit, retain, reward and develop well-qualified educators at high-need schools and to ensure students have equitable access to educational resources and opportunities. This project aligns with the goals of the Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program and key elements of the *Department of Education's Raise the Bar: Lead the World Call to Action*, the WCPSS Strategic Plan, Equity Policy 1150, Retention and Recruitment Core Team Framework, and other state initiatives (Appendix F). Project LEADERS targets 24 high-need schools in the district where large concentrations of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Project LEADERS takes an innovative, evidence-based approach to address both **Absolute Priorities and Competitive Preference Priorities 1 and 2**.

**Absolute Priority #1: Expanding Human Capital Management System (HCMS)**

This year, WCPSS will implement three major strategic initiatives that expand current human capital management (HCMS) as part of Project LEADERS. First, WCPSS will implement iCIMS, an innovative recruiting software platform that provides a holistic approach to educator hiring practices and the development of a more diverse, inclusive, and culturally responsive workforce by bringing increased transparency to hiring processes and practices. Hiring managers can query the iCIMS system for existing applicants and improve hiring efficiency with an integrated and fluid workflow.

Project LEADERS will allow WCPSS to expand and enhance its human capital management system through **online recruitment and social media marketing services**. These services include developing creative messaging and advertising strategies to recruit for priority positions (e.g., teachers, instructional assistants, and teacher leaders). These enhanced services will also create a microsite destination to direct targeted traffic to these landing pages to increase awareness and candidate flow, capturing information that will strengthen WCPSS' ability to enhance the educator recruitment, application, hiring, and employment process.

Second, Project LEADERS supports implementing the ACTIVATE® platform to allow job seekers multiple ways to search for positions (keyword, location, and category) and make it easy for candidates to find career opportunities and capture active job seekers that query job-related search terms/keywords such as “school job openings,” and “teacher positions,” and develop branded messaging, banner advertisements, and social media posts to attract quality candidates. Combining these services, WCPSS will partner with a recruitment and advertising agency to:

1. Develop compelling and creative messaging targeting potential candidates, focusing on WCPSS as an employer of choice. Potential applicants will also learn about employee benefits, company values, employee testimonial content, and current job opportunities.
2. Augment the messaging with multiple campaigns for search, display banners, programmatic, and social media campaigns.
3. Reach a larger market share.
4. Monitor progress on hiring goals using a data dashboard with metrics, measure return on investment (ROI) and key performance indicators such as the number of visitors to the microsite, job views, completed applications, etc.

Third, to further enhance the HCMS through this project, WCPSS seeks to hire a Director of Talent Acquisition, and part of their job duties will involve overseeing the iCIMS applicant tracking system and work with the recruitment and advertising agency to provide oversight of the ACTIVATE® platform and social media marketing services. WCPSS will also hire two (full-time) Senior Administrator Recruiters who will be responsible for sourcing, contacting and pre-screening candidates for certified and non-certified positions within the district. They will use recruiting techniques and strategies to create a pipeline of candidates for high volume and time sensitive positions.

Ultimately, these enhanced HCMS partnerships and strategies will move WCPSS Human Resources from a **transactional** to a **transformational** department in recruiting, retaining, and developing a talented pool of diverse school leaders, teachers, and instructional assistants.

**Implementation of a Performance-Based Compensation System (PBCS) in collaboration with teachers, principals, other school leaders, and members of the public**

To solicit support and buy-in for the project, WCPSS leadership and the Project LEADERS team collaborated with teachers, principals, school leaders, researchers, and other key stakeholders. During a recent listening session (June 2023), teachers provided input for performance-based compensation and incentives in the context of the TSL grant competition. An overall theme emerged: “*teachers want to be respected and compensated*” and “*they want to be valued.*” One teacher believed her “*school was set up to fail*” because of its lack of educational resources for its large population of economically disadvantaged Black and Hispanic students and low student academic achievement. An assistant principal discussed that a new **beginning teacher at her school could not afford the high cost of living in the Raleigh area** and relocated to another school district. In preparation for this grant opportunity, principals, Chief of Schools, area superintendents, assistant superintendents, a Distinguished Professor of

Education Reform at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill who has specialized in HCMS and PBCS for nearly two decades, and central office staff attended planning meetings and participated in discussions to provide their feedback and suggestions to design an **effective, evidence-based, and sustainable** PBCS for teachers, instructional assistants, and school leaders. Stakeholder input from educators, the public, and school leaders was vital in designing a PBCS with incentives and advanced leadership roles that provide “teachers new roles with additional pay and responsibilities, career advancement opportunities believed to encourage retention” (Cresap & Paget Inc., 1984). Based on the feedback from educators and school leaders, a PBCS will be developed and implemented in the 24 targeted high-need schools to provide:

1. Incentives to attract and retain highly qualified teachers and school leaders
2. Robust support for professional growth and career pathways (advanced teacher roles/career ladders) for teachers to expand their leadership and increase classroom effectiveness.
3. Performance-based compensation to well-qualified teachers and school leaders who meet or exceed growth in high-need schools to close the achievement gap for low-performing students.

**Absolute Priority #2: High-need Schools and describe how the TSL-assisted grant activities are focused on those schools**

A multi-pronged approach was employed to identify the WCPSS schools and students most needing comprehensive supports provided through the TSL grant program. All elementary and middle schools in WCPSS were considered eligible for Project LEADERS if 50% or more of their students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch, they carried a D or F school performance grade, and they met one (or more) of the following conditions:

Have a C, D, or F school performance grade (in North Carolina, school performance grades are based on a A-F letter system and are assigned using a weighted model of the school proficiency score (80%) and the school growth score (20%) combined) and

- a. A school growth index score below 0.75 or
- b. Under-represented minority students comprise 60% or more of the student body; two-year average teacher turnover is greater than 20%, and fewer than half of the students met basic grade level performance standards or
- c. Free and reduced-price lunch status students comprise 60% or more of the student population and the school growth index is average or below average or
- d. Located in one of the 10 district-identified high-priority school feeder patterns or
- e. Has been identified by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as a Restart Model school.

Of the 198 schools within the district, **60** are identified as high-need schools with 50% or more of their students qualifying for free or reduced lunch that ranges from **59% - 81.6%** (average of 70%). On average, 62% of students that attend the 60 high-need schools are economically disadvantaged (range of 51.1% – 73.6%). Project LEADERS is unable to serve all 60 high-need schools. To make participation equitable and fair participating schools were randomly selected. Project LEADERS will target a subset of **24** high-need schools (see Table 1 below and Appendix E for a list of the targeted high-need schools) and these schools represent **40% of the total 60 high-need schools** in the district.

**Table 1: Targeted High-need Schools in WCPSS****Source: WCPSS District Facts (2022-23)**

School Name	FRL%	School Name	FRL%	School Name	FRL%	School Name	FRL%
Baileywick Road ES	59%	Dillard Drive ES	58%	Knightdale ES	70.6%	Timber Drive ES	59%
Barwell Road ES	81%	East Garner MS	71.6%	Lockhart ES	70.4%	Wake Forest ES	56%
Brentwood ES	69%	East Millbrook MS	72.4%	Lynn Road ES	52%	Walnut Creek ES	72%
Bugg ES	72%	Forestville Road ES	73.9%	Neuse River MS	73%	Wilburn ES	81.2%
Carroll Middle	59%	Green ES	63%	Poe ES	54%	Wildwood ES	81.6%
Centennial Campus MS	61%	Hodge Road ES	67.8%	River Bend ES	68.3%	Zebulon MS	67%

**Competitive Preference # 1: Promoting equity in student access to educational resources**

High-need schools located in **concentrated poverty and low-income areas** face difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers (higher attrition) and students of color are likely to be relocated to schools with poor working conditions (Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2015; Loeb et al., 2005). The **inequitable distribution of high-quality teachers** across school districts are a **source of persistent inequity and inadequacy** in educational opportunity (Feng & Sass, 2017; Goldhaber et al., 2017; Imazeki, 2005; Scafidi et al., 2007). Ronfeldt et al. (2013). This documents the negative impact of teacher turnover on student learning. Hammond (2001) argues “research suggests that inequitable distributions of qualified teachers are a **major cause of the achievement gap**. Recent studies have found that differential teacher effectiveness is an extremely strong determinant of differences in student learning, far outweighing the effects of differences in class size and heterogeneity” (p. 212). Students assigned to ineffective teachers often have lower achievement gains (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Conversely, research confirms that “students taught by National Board-Certified Teachers (NBCTs) learn more than students taught by other teachers” (PDK Gallop Poll, 2015). Oakes et al. (2019) indicate that North Carolina, “has



very few policies to address the deep inequities in the distribution of qualified, experienced, and skilled teachers. Granted, historically, the state has offered incentives for teachers to teach in high-poverty schools. However, those programs have not been comprehensive enough and or addressed the underlying causes of the disproportionate distribution of the large number of National Board Certified Teachers in North Carolina (p. 92).”

Although WCPSS has one of the largest numbers of National Board Certified teachers (NBCT) in the nation, approximately **89%** of the district’s NBCTs are white. As part of a national push for greater diversity among educators and to ensure that every child benefits from high-quality instruction, the National Board Certification process must be accessible for more teachers --particularly teachers of color (Brookings, 2016).

On November 16, 2022, the WCPSS Board of Education adopted, Equity Policy 1150 (see Appendix F), to create a safe, orderly, caring, and inviting school environment to facilitate student learning and achievement. The policy states: “the Board acknowledges that disparities exist within our school district, and that there is a predictive association between race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status and student outcomes. These patterns are not unique to the Wake County Public School System and are evident across the country. The Board believes equity benefits all students...**the district will endeavor to provide students with equitable access to effective teachers and principals, and sufficient support services, even when this means differentiating resource allocation; provide access to equitable school facilities and support facilities (WCPSS, 2022, p. 2).**”

Project LEADERS will **ensure non-licensed educators** serving at the 24 high-need schools will be offered opportunities to advance their professional credentials and skills to become licensed through the pursuit of National Board Certification to **improve the retention of**

**fully certified, experienced, and effective educators in the targeted high-need schools.** The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards offers the National Board Certification at a cost of \$1,900. Project LEADERS will support the cost of this certification for non-licensed educators to **ensure underserved students have access to certified teachers and increase the number of fully certified teachers in the targeted high-need schools.** WCPSS has among the highest number of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in the nation, partly due the district supporting teachers as they seek certification and compensating them upon certification. Removing the upfront financial obligation in the certification process will improve recruitment and retention of teachers and instructional assistants at high-need schools and encourage them to seek greater credentialing.

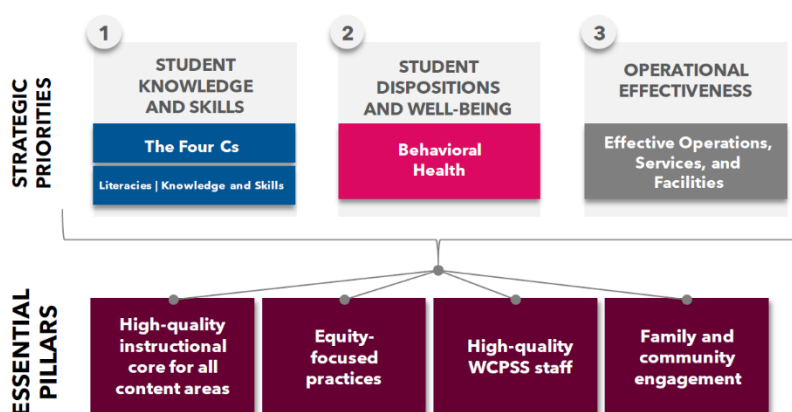
***Competitive Preference # 2: Supporting a diverse educator workforce and professional growth to strengthen student learning***

WCPSS' new five-year strategic plan was adopted on May 16, 2023 (see Figure 1 and Appendix F) and includes four essential pillars. The core pillar involving the hiring of **high-quality WCPSS staff directly aligns with Project LEADERS** by supporting a diverse educator workforce and professional growth to strengthen student learning. To ***Hire and Retain Diverse Staff*** is one of the aims in this policy. This will be achieved in the district using the following strategies:

- ***Review and Strengthen Existing Structures*** - Review and strengthen existing hiring and retention practices and structures to ensure alignment with school and department needs.
- ***Recruitment Marketing*** - Create and implement new recruitment and marketing plans to identify, develop, and sustain diverse talent pipelines.

- ***Streamlined Hiring and Onboarding Processes*** - Develop and provide a supportive, streamlined application, hiring, and onboarding experience to fill all job roles with effective, qualified employees who reflect the Wake County community.
- ***Compensation*** - Create and provide a compensation and benefits structure that is competitive with the public and private market.

WCPSS will invest in teachers and school leaders, building their capacity to engage students in learning. The enhanced HCMS will provide robust marketing tools and strategies that support recruitment of highly qualified school leaders and teachers to enable the district to increase diversity in the talent pool as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: WCPSS Strategic Plan (2023)**

School districts nationwide are exploring various recruitment and retention strategies to reward teachers who work in hard-

to-staff schools (Springer, 2009) and finding great success (Pham et al., 2022). WCPSS recognizes the symbiotic relationship that exists between employee recruitment, retention, and student achievement and seeks to address these issues holistically and simultaneously through Project LEADERS. Professional development courses will be offered to ensure the consistent implementation of instructional strategies and practices that improve student achievement. Project LEADERS will offer Professional Learning Pathways (PLPs) (see Appendix F) to provide professional development, future career opportunities, and advanced leadership roles for both teachers and instructional assistants. Core components of the PLP

include equity, curriculum & instruction, professional learning committees (PLCs), building classroom culture, leadership (including cognitive coaching), teacher residency, global competencies, and professional development opportunities for alternatively licensed teachers to obtain professional educators' licenses. The state of North Carolina allows candidates who hold bachelor's degrees (or higher) outside of education to obtain provisional educators' licenses through the Residency Licensure Pathway. Through Project LEADERS, these residency licensed teachers will participate in the Central Carolina Teaching Initiative: (CCTI) Wake-Durham, a North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) approved Educator Preparation Program (EPP). The Residency Pathway allows qualified individuals to obtain teaching positions and begin teaching while simultaneously completing the coursework required to obtain a clear NC professional educator's license (NCDPI, n.d.). Participants complete all program requirements while teaching full-time. Successful completion of the CCTI: Wake-Durham program leads to the North Carolina Professional Educators License. In addition to alternatively licensed teachers, instructional assistants will also have the opportunity to earn a teaching degree at one of the three university partners (North Carolina State University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, or North Carolina Central University) and participate in the Residency Pathway.

Project LEADERS will also offer the instructional assistants, teachers, teacher leaders, and school leaders an opportunity to engage in research-based, instructional practices through tiered professional learning. Through the lens of equity, all staff will be required to attend rigorous and intensive training on the models of core curriculum & instruction, PLCs, building classroom culture, leadership (including cognitive coaching), and global competencies. These trainings will be offered through a variety of models, including, in-person, asynchronous, classroom visits, professional conferences, internal staff presentations and external presenters.

Project LEADERS will assess the effectiveness of the PLPs implementation through a series of participant surveys, formative student data collection, and the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES) observation data. Schools participating in Project LEADERS will build instructional teams with sustainable frameworks of support. These teams will consist of teacher leaders and school leaders. Their responsibilities will be to collect and analyze the PLP data on a frequent basis, monitor the implementation of the instructional strategies and practices learned, and provide staff with individual and ongoing coaching.

Valuing the diversity of the school community and increasing the diversity of educators is a key strategy to raising student growth and closing achievement gaps in WCPSS' high-need schools. Research shows that there are, “. . . important educational benefits--cognitive, social, and emotional--for all students who interact with classmates from different backgrounds, cultures, and orientation to the world” (Wells, et al., 2016). Teachers of color tend to have higher expectations of their students of color, offer more culturally relevant teaching, and have a better understanding of the circumstances of their students of color. These factors may contribute to a “significant positive effect on standardized test scores of students of color when they are taught by teachers of color” (Partelow, et al., 2017).

Teachers, instructional assistants, and school leaders serving in high-need schools will receive incentives and performance bonuses for meeting or exceeding growth at their schools. These incentives will support their personal and educational growth, strengthen instructional practices, and build an inclusive climate.

### **Need for the Project**

On January 24, 2023, Secretary Miguel Cardona launched the “Raise the Bar: Lead the World Initiative. In his speech he stated, “*Today, we Raise the Bar in education. The same is not good enough anymore. If we do what we’ve done, we’re going to get what we’ve gotten. We’re*

*better than that. Our children deserve better than that*" (p. 2). The "will to Raise the Bar and fully support students and schools, can improve outcomes for all students and prepare them for a future of global competitiveness and lifelong learning" (US Department of Education, 2023, p.1).

To **"Raise the Bar"** within the district, WCPSS seeks to implement Project LEADERS to *enhance educational opportunities and positively impact student achievement* through a state-of-the-art, evidence-informed, HCMS and PBCS that recruits, retains, develops, and recognizes higher performing teachers and school leaders at high-need schools. Project LEADERS will impact approximately 13,453 students, 150 teachers, 144 instructional assistants, and 48 school leaders (principals and assistant principals).

Table 2 below compares the demographics of all students attending WCPSS' 198 schools, students attending all 60 high-need schools, and students attending only the 24 targeted high-need schools. Students attending all 60 WCPSS high-need schools are majority Black (**39.6%**) and Hispanic (**29.6%**) though they only make up **21.9%** and **19.3%** of the total WCPSS student population respectively. Black and Hispanic students represent **71%** of the total number of students attending the 24 targeted Project LEADERS high-need schools. Students attending the 24 targeted schools are **54%** (on average) economically disadvantaged with an average free and reduced lunch (FRL) rate of **64%**.

**Table 2: WCPSS Student Demographics by Race/Ethnicity**

<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Pacific Islander</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Two or more races</b>
<b>All WCPSS Schools</b>	42.8%	21.9%	19.3%	11.6%	.10%	0.2%	4%
<b>All High-need Schools</b>	21.8%	39.6%	29.6%	4.31%	.2%	0.3%	4.28%
<b>24 Targeted Schools</b>	21.09%	39.4%	31.3%	3.3%	.1%	0.4%	4.25%

*Source: District Facts 2022-2023*

The data show that most Black and Hispanic students in WCPSS primarily attend high-need and low-performing schools in the district. Therefore, it is important to ensure these students have access to qualified and effective teachers to improve their educational outcomes.

*(i) Specific gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities*

**Gaps and Weaknesses: Educational Gaps & Low Student Achievement in High-Need Schools**

Teaching is one of the few professions where someone new to the job is evaluated based on the expectation that they will show the same level of proficiency as their experienced colleagues. There is increased consensus that highly qualified and effective teachers are necessary to improve student performance. John Hattie (2014), a noted education researcher, concluded the only variable schools can impact to improve student outcomes are teachers. Teacher effectiveness is often defined as the ability to produce gains in student achievement scores (Little, et al., 2009), and research clearly shows teachers are the single most important within-school determinant of student learning. Teachers matter most when it comes to a student's academic performance (Opper, n.d). Table 3 below documents the **magnitude of the educational gaps** for WCPSS' targeted high-need schools (see Appendix E for a detailed table documenting the magnitude of the achievement gap that includes the growth, proficiency, and performance grade, at each targeted high-need school).

***Table 3: Magnitude of the Educational Gaps in Project LEADERS schools***

Number that did not meet growth goals (3 year avg.)	Average proficiency rate%	Average teacher turnover rate%	Average % of students of color	Average % of Teachers of Color
8	41%	27%	79%	40%

*Source: NCDPI 2021-22 School Report Card*

The 2021-22 NCDPI School Performance data (most recent data available) for all **60 high-need schools** in the WCPSS district indicate:

# of schools with a Performance Grade of F	# of Schools with a Performance Grade of D	# of Schools with a Performance Grade of C	# of Alternative Schools (No performance grade assigned)
4	42	8	6*

Source: NCDPI 2021-22 School Report Card

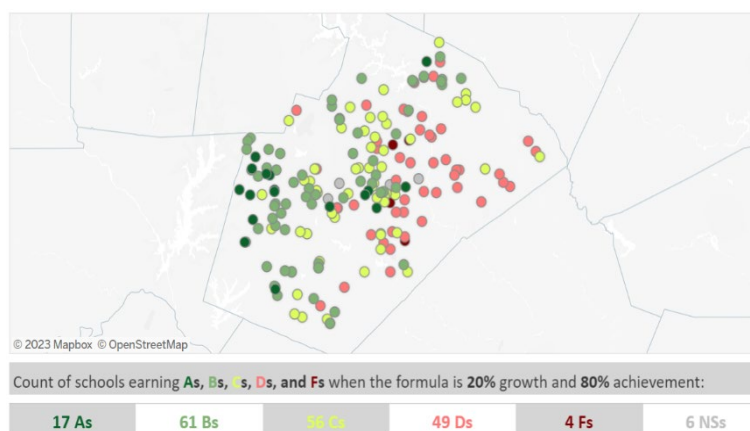
\*WCPSS currently has 7 Alternative Schools for the 2022-23 school year, however data provided is from 2021-22; performance grades are not assigned to Alternative Schools in the WCPSS district

For the **24** targeted high-need schools:

# of schools with a Performance Grade of F	# of Schools with a Performance Grade of D	# of Schools with a Performance Grade of C
2	18	4

Source: NCDPI 2021-22 School Report Card

**Figure 2: WCPSS School Performance Grades (2021-22)**  
Source: Emily Antoszyk, EdNC, Consider it Mapped (2022)



As the data indicates, none of the 24 targeted Project LEADERS high-need schools received an A or B in performance. When mapping the performance grades of all schools across the lowest-performing schools (i.e.,

those receiving a grade of D or F) are clustered in the east/northeast areas of the county as indicated in Figure 2. This map includes the performance grade for WCPSS schools during the 2021-22 school year (most recent data available). The map indicates the following: performance grade A: 17 schools (dark green), performance grade B: 61 (light green), performance grade C: 56 schools (lime green), performance grade D: 49 (pink), performance grade F: 4 schools (dark red), and no scores were received for WCPSS' six alternative schools. School districts have several



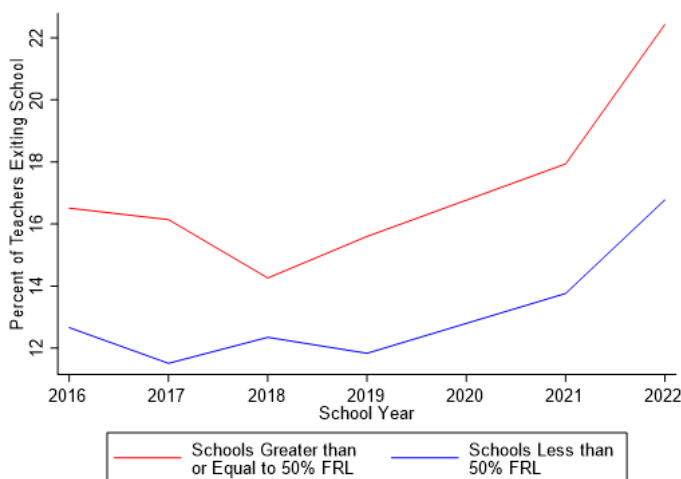
options for participation in the state’s Alternative Schools’ Modified Accountability System and their decision impacts whether they opt to have school performance grades allocated to the identified alternative schools. WCPSS has opted not to have performance grade scores assigned to alternative schools.

Because low student achievement is a multi-dimensional issue with many contributing factors, Project LEADERS will provide performance-based compensation and incentives to recruit and retain teachers and leaders in the 24 targeted high-need schools and provide professional development opportunities to improve overall student achievement and outcomes.

**Gaps and Weaknesses: High Teacher Attrition & Poor Retention**

Research indicates “a staggering **55** percent of educators are thinking about leaving the profession earlier than they had planned” and “a disproportionate percentage of Black (62%) and Hispanic/Latino (59%) educators, already underrepresented in the teaching profession, were looking toward the exits” (Walker, 2022). Each year, more than 200,000 teachers leave the profession, with nearly two out of three leaving for reasons other than retirement (Podolsky, et al., 2016). Black teachers are the most likely to leave the profession altogether and white teachers prefer to teach in schools with the fewest poor and lowest achieving students (Boyd et.al., 2011). The Partnership for the Future of Learning (2021) indicates: “The recruitment and retention of well-prepared teachers—teachers with strong content and pedagogical knowledge and the ability to demonstrate both—are central to improving school and addressing persistent educational inequities. Teachers of color benefit students of color, serving as role models, cultural translators, and advocates; having high expectations; and supporting social, emotional, and academic growth” (p. 39).

According to the NCDPI, the overall state-wide teacher attrition rate is **7.53%**, and the attrition rate for WCPSS is **10.2%**. A closer inspection of the WCPSS data, however, reveals the true attrition rate—that is, the share of teachers who exit their current schools, either to transfer to a different school within the district or to leave the district entirely—is much greater. Figure 3 below shows WCPSS schools where FRL students make up more than 50% of the student population (i.e., “high-need schools”) and have consistently higher attrition rates than schools where FRL students make up less than 50% of the student population. Moreover, the true attrition rate has increased in recent years during and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, among teachers observed during the 2021-22 school year, about **23%** in high-need schools transferred or left WCPSS at the end of that year, compared to about **17%** in non-high-need schools.



**Figure 3. WCPSS Teacher resignations or those applying for transfers by percent free and reduced lunch (FRL)** Source: WCPSS Data, Research, and Accountability Office

Nationally, teachers leave the profession due to poor compensation, lack of support, and lack of value for the teaching profession. Within the WCPSS district, teachers primarily leave because

of personal reasons (dissatisfaction, relocation, career changes), or leave to teach in a charter school.

**Gaps and Weaknesses: Low Teacher Pay and No System for Incentivizing and Rewarding High Quality Educators**

The teacher pipeline is shrinking within North Carolina and the state is in a teaching crisis.

Dr. [REDACTED], a Distinguished Professor at UNC-Chapel Hill School of Education and

Lead Consultant for Project LEADERS, wrote, *“our teacher compensation system is broken. Not only is it broken, but the way we pay teachers is doing harm”* (Springer & Hobbs, 2019). The single salary pay schedule commonly used by school districts across the country contributes to an inequitable distribution of highly effective teachers that is stifling academic progress among the nation’s neediest students. An inequitable distribution of highly effective teachers is contributing to hard-to-close achievement gaps in K-12 education. When the incentive programs are carefully designed and implemented, paying highly effective teacher salary incentives can help reduce teacher turnover, leading to higher student achievement (Pham et al, 2020).

The teacher pay penalty is defined as the gap between teachers’ salaries and the wages of comparable college-educated professionals (Allegretto & Mishel, 2020). Beginning teachers earn about **20%** less than individuals with college degrees in other fields, a wage gap that can widen to **30%** for mid-career educators (Podolsky et al., 2016). The Economic Policy Institute calculates the “teacher pay penalty” for North Carolina is **24.5%**, the **15th highest** among all states. This highlights North Carolina’s challenge in attracting high-quality teachers (Guillory, 2020). Average state-funded teacher pay, when adjusted for inflation, decreased \$3,020 between 2004 to 2020 (WRAL, 2022). COVID-19 and other market forces have been pulling human resource talent away from WCPSS, requiring salary increases from local funding to remain competitive. Legislated pay increases have not kept up with inflation and years of inadequate funding have made teacher pay noncompetitive. In 2021, North Carolina ranked 38th in the nation in average teacher pay, with an average teacher salary of **\$53,458** (NEA, 2022). The current teacher salary peaks at **\$54,000**, while a beginning teacher starting pay is **\$37,000** (Hyland, 2022).

Another area of critical need for WCPSS relates to recruiting and retaining teachers in high-need schools. WCPSS is facing headwinds that are beyond the scope of this grant, such as the fact that enrollment in undergraduate teacher preparation programs at state universities has decreased by **39%** between 2021 and 2022, bringing enrollment down to numbers not seen since 2017 (Granados, 2023). Legislation has reduced job security, incentives to pursue advanced degrees, and retirement benefits over the past decade. Cuts to funding for professional development and other support for educators discourage those in the profession. ***If teaching is not elevated and treated as a profession, there will be an even more dire shortage of teachers.***

WCPSS currently has no performance-based compensation system to incentivize and retain high performing teachers to work and stay at low-performing schools, and to recruit new teachers. As of June 2023, WCPSS has approximately **400 teacher and 157 instructional assistant vacancies** throughout the district. Recently WCPSS has seen neighboring school districts offer signing and retention bonuses to recruit and retain teachers, creating increased competition for a shrinking pool of teachers. [REDACTED], WCPSS' assistant superintendent of Human Resources stated, *"We know for us even **one vacancy** means a classroom without a teacher or critical support staff."* The implementation of Project LEADERS is essential to reducing the vacancies in the district and ensuring all students reach their full potential and successfully prepare them for life after graduation.

**Gaps and Weaknesses: Increasing number of Restart schools**

NCDPI established a variety of school reform models. WCPSS has elected to have **30** schools to participate in the Restart Model (2022-23 school year). **Four additional schools** will be added to the Restart model in fall 2023. These are schools that have been designated as **recurring low-performing** for at least two of the last three years. Under this model, the local

school board retains authority over the schools, and their employees remain employed with the district. The district submits a transformation plan to show how the school will change and provide each student with a sound, basic education while using exemptions from statutes, along with rules established for charter schools to gain flexibility. The relaxed regulations permit schools to extend the school day, use funds in ways not designated by the state, hire teachers for positions other than those for which they are licensed, etc. They have the flexibility to hire teachers to teach classes even if they are not licensed for that subject (Hinchcliffe & Granados, 2018). However, the increasing number of schools designated as a Restart school each year within the WCPSS district is a growing concern as student academic achievement is decreasing.

**Gaps and Weakness: Strengthen the Capacity of HR Recruitment Staff**

With a growing population in the Wake County area, WCPSS will undoubtedly feel the impact of this continued growth with the likely outcome being the need for more classrooms and consequently, more teachers. Currently the district only has **one recruiter**. With the size of this district (20,000+ employees including over 10,000 teachers), and to address the increasing number of teacher vacancies, it is crucial to hire additional recruitment positions to strengthen the district's HCMS and its capacity to recruit effective teachers in classrooms.

**Relevant Outcomes Using Existing Funding Streams**

WCPSS receives Title II funds to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other school leaders in the district. Title II funds are used to support WCPSS' Future Teacher Program. The WCPSS Future Teachers Program began in 2015 as a **grow-your-own** initiative to fill the increased number of teacher vacancies resulting from the cumulative effect of teacher attrition and the district's explosive growth. The Future Teachers program seeks to positively impact the readiness of the beginning teachers hired by growing fully-licensed teachers, predominantly those who are graduates of WCPSS. Unlike other grow-your-own

programs, Future Teachers was designed to approach sourcing, recruitment, and hiring from a unique vantage point--**developing the internal talent of high school seniors who had chosen to pursue careers in education and who were committed to teaching with WCPSS upon the completion of their teacher preparation programs.** In subsequent years, the program expanded to include freshman and sophomore education majors at **five** colleges and universities located within Wake County- Meredith College, NC State University, Shaw University, St Augustine's University, and William Peace University. Most recently, North Carolina Central University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have been added, as well. Each year, a WCPSS Future Teachers conference is held to provide Future Teachers with opportunities to:

- Build professional networks with peers and WCPSS team members;
- Interact with and learn from WCPSS leaders and subject area experts;
- Internalize the vision, mission, and values of WCPSS and identify how their core beliefs align with those of the district; and
- Envision ways to practically apply the skills, educational theories, and instructional practices from their teacher preparation programs within WCPSS.

Upon selection in the program, students sign early conditional hire agreements for teaching jobs with WCPSS. To finalize employment, Future Teachers must successfully complete an educator preparation program, satisfy all NC testing & licensure eligibility requirements, and meet all WCPSS hiring criteria. The Future Teachers program has a current retention rate of 75%. Approximately 69% of Future Teachers have resulted in teachers hires, and 85% of them are still employed as WCPSS teachers.

The WCPSS Teacher Support Program (TSP) is also supported through Title II funds to provide continuous support to beginning teachers (BTs) through one-on-one mentoring at the

school level, and extensive assistance through school-level group meetings and staff development. Veteran teachers serve as mentors and provide BTs with comprehensive mentor training. Mentors serve as coaches and supporters to new teachers, assisting in their professional growth through reflective practice, modeling, and classroom observations. Support is offered in the following manner:

- The trained mentor works directly with the beginning teacher to observe lessons and to offer feedback prior to formal administrative observations
- The mentor coordinator at each school develops a year-long Support Group Plan tailored to meet the specific needs of the school's novice teachers
- Monthly support group meetings are conducted for beginning teachers to foster professional growth through collaboration, dialogue, and reflection on the practice and profession of teaching.

WCPSS has demonstrated its investment in teacher and leadership development throughout the district and will leverage its resources to ensure the successful implementation of this project. Project LEADERS will build on the success of these district-wide initiatives to strengthen its capacity to recruit, retain, and develop educators in high-need schools.

***(iii) Part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning***

The **Central Carolina Teaching Initiative (CCTI)-Wake Durham** is a partnership between WCPSS Board of Education and Durham County Board of Education (see MOU included in Appendix C) and serves as an autonomous educator preparation program (EPP) and residency model to clinically prepare teachers to serve in the schools in which they work. **Both WCPSS and Durham Public Schools (DPS) staff administer courses** such as General Education, Elementary Education, and Exceptional Children Pathways. Upon an alternatively licensed

teacher's successful completion of the CCTI program, WCPSS and DPS can approve their licensure upgrade and send the appropriate information to NCDPI to clear the license and issue a standard license. WCPSS serves as the fiscal agent for the CCTI-Wake Durham program.

WCPSS Retention and Recruitment Core Team was established in March 2022 to create and implement the systems and structures needed to competitively recruit and retain a diverse, highly effective workforce that reflects the Wake County community. This core team is comprised of (30+ individuals) teachers, area superintendents, Chiefs, assistant superintendents, principals, and other central office staff that meet on a monthly basis. The core team has successfully created a **comprehensive Retention and Recruitment Framework (40+ page document that includes detailed goals, action steps, & desired outcomes)** for WCPSS that aligns with the purpose and intent of Project LEADERS (a section of this framework is included in Appendix F). The goals of this core team include:

- 1) develop and sustain diverse talent pipelines and develop a compensation and benefits structure that is competitive with the public and private market
- 2) establish a supportive, streamlined hiring and onboarding experience
- 3) collaborate with internal & external partners to strengthen and improve marketing and advertising for all position categories
- 4) review and expand the “grow your own” recruitment programs to fill teacher vacancies
- 5) strengthen and build new partnerships with educational industries and professional associations to bring educators of color to the teaching profession.

WCPSS utilizes the **Participate Learning** international education programs and services to increase student knowledge of other languages and cultures including global schools, dual language immersion schools and exchange visitor teacher programs. The program is designated



by the Department of State as a sponsor of an exchange visitor (J-1 visa) program that provides opportunities for schools to host teachers (Ambassador Teachers) from around the world to teach temporarily in the United States for up to a period of three years with the possibility of an additional two-year extension. Upon the end of this extension, these educators share the U.S. experience with schools in their home counties. Participate offers a Dual Language Program which is an intensive language immersion model to allow students to gain a second language (Mandarin, Spanish, etc.) while excelling in their core studies (Participate Learning, 2020). A letter of support from Participate Learning in addition to a MOU is included in Appendix C.

NC Governor Roy Cooper established a task force to **Develop a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education (DRIVE)** that was charged to assess the state's progress towards creating and sustaining a diverse educator workforce and developing a plan to strengthen and coordinate state efforts. The task force advises the Governor on strategies that would improve equity and inclusion in education. DRIVE studied teacher diversity in North Carolina and found that 79% of North Carolina's teachers are white, while 47% of students are white. Teachers of color have positive impacts on reading and math scores; they use culturally relevant practices to affirm student identities; Black students are less likely to drop out when taught by at least one Black teacher and are more likely to express interest in college. Teachers of color leave the teaching profession at high rates, 24% higher per year than white teachers. They often report feeling **devalued, questioned, and silenced**. [REDACTED], Chair of the Task Force and Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Winston-Salem State University (see letter of support in Appendix C) presented DRIVE's findings to the WCPSS Board of Education on May 18, 2021, and recently served (May 15, 2023) as the **keynote speaker at the WCPSS 2023 Future Teachers Conference**.

The Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission (PEPSC) was established in 2017 to serve as an advising body to the North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE). One of the initiatives they are currently working on is teacher pay reform. PEPSC seeks to implement the North Carolina Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals, a multi-tiered licensure and pay model to provide educators with multiple career pathways, professional growth opportunities, and compensation for teachers. PEPSC aims to begin piloting this program in fall 2023. WCPSS is a stakeholder and staff from human resources have served on PEPSC's committee to provide input and recommendations for the proposed licensure and pay model to improve education and recruit and retain teachers across the state.

WCPSS' Superintendent, [REDACTED] serves on the Board of Directors for the Teacher Innovation Project (TIP). TIP is a nonprofit network of superintendents across the state who want to be a part of a community of leaders to **rethink, reimagine, and redesign** public education with **equity and access** as foundational goals.

*iv) Design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs*

Appendix A contains logic models for Project LEADERS of the HCMS and PBCS to document the design of the proposed project to successfully implement innovative marketing and recruitment strategies, provide professional development, and performance-based compensation for teachers, instructional assistants, and school leaders. The design of Project LEADERS is intentional and based on sustainable evidence-based practices to strengthen WCPSS' capacity to recruit, retain, and develop teachers in high-need schools to improve student achievement. Springer (2023) states: "well-designed incentive pay system offers tremendous potential... we now have an opportunity to invest in strategic compensation reforms that correct inequities in

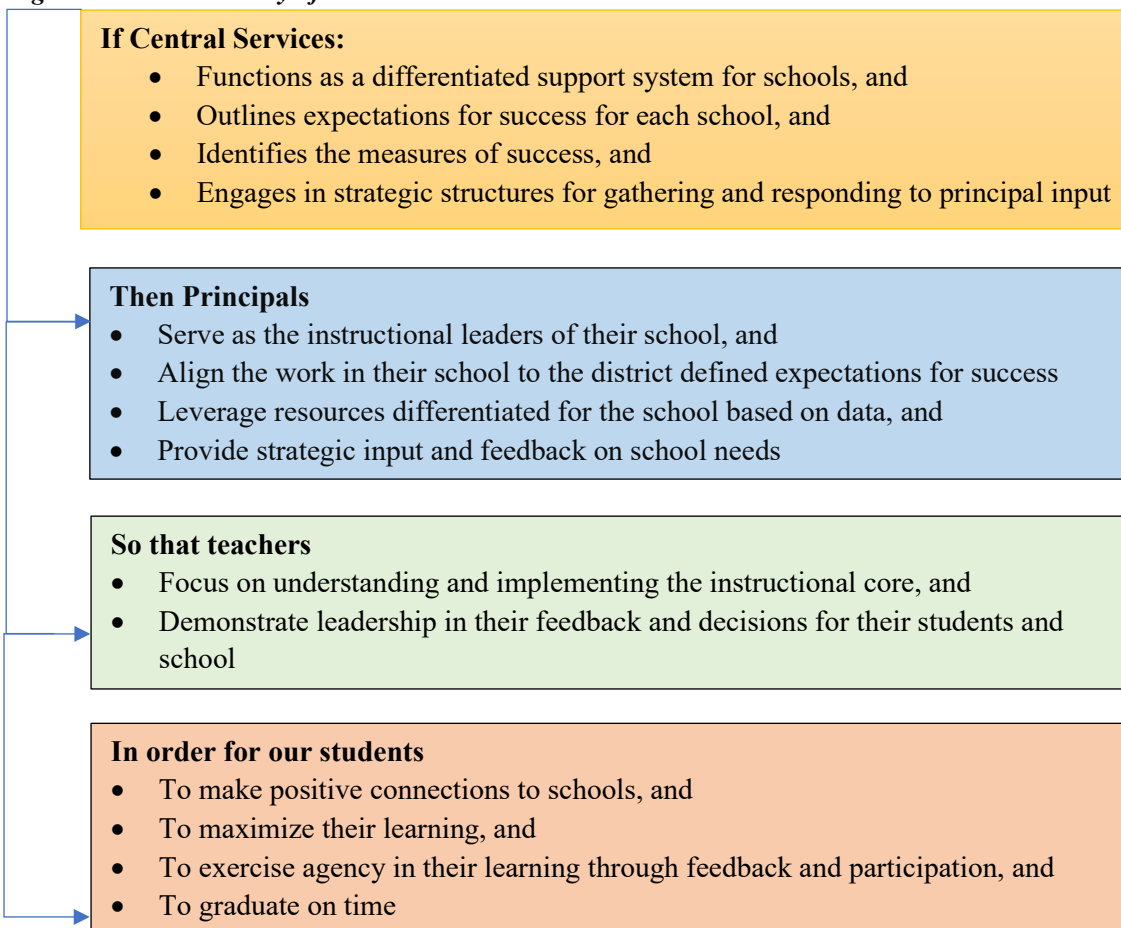
access to quality education, elevate student achievement, and improve resource efficiency without abandoning equitable opportunity for pay. It is time to make those investments” (p. 77 & 79).

### **Quality of Program Design**

#### ***(i) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale***

Project LEADERS builds upon the district’s core beliefs, the Retention and Recruitment Core Team Framework, Equity Policy 1150, and the theory of action used in the new WCPSS strategic plan. The theory of action examines outcomes when targeted strategies are implemented to achieve the desired results. Grounded in analysis of data, the theory of action outlines accountability for all staff, from Central Services to school leaders and teachers and other school-based staff to support each student to succeed in school and in life. Figure 4 outlines the WCPSS Theory of Action.

***During its initial meeting,*** the Retention and Recruitment Core Team conducted a district-wide review of data such as vacancies by position type, staff resignations by month, exit data, and teacher surveys. Post-COVID data demonstrates the district continues to struggle to fill vacancies. In 2022, all staff members' resignations increased an average of **44% per month** over the prior school year. Within the last year and a half, the core team has designed and developed a comprehensive framework (see Appendix F) to guide the district’s work to decrease vacancies across the district and attract a high-quality teaching workforce.

**Figure 4: WCPSS Theory of Action**

**(ii) *High-quality review of the relevant literature, a high-quality plan for project implementation, and the use of appropriate methodological tools to ensure successful achievement of project objectives***

The core of Project LEADERS begins with enhancing the HCMS and creating a PBCS to support improvements to recruitment, hiring, and retention of high-performing teachers and leaders. To further highlight how research and professional development inform the design of Project LEADERS. Below is a description of the project's key objectives:

***Objective 1: Enhance HCMS to recruit a diverse teacher workforce; increase transparency in the hiring process (Aligns with Absolute Priority #1)***

Managing human resources effectively requires accurate, multifaceted, and real-time data that can support decision-making, planning, hiring, onboarding, and retention of employees. The

proposed marketing and recruitment enhancements will improve reporting systems that provide data necessary for candidate sourcing and increased and improved applicant recruitment to ensure the project delivers a high-quality educational experience.

Enhancements to iCIMS will support expansion of recruitment and retention efforts for all WCPSS schools and provide tools needed to recruit educators of color throughout the district. This strategy aligns with evidence-based practices documented by IES Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest meeting materials that highlighted best practices in recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. They found that districts that successfully recruit and retain teachers of color, 1) often use data-driven targeted strategies to inform outreach, 2) publish vacancy notices early in the process, and hire early in the process, and 3) offer competitive salaries and benefits (Motamedi and Stevens, 2018). An enhanced system will provide the critical intelligence and real-time analytics needed to effectively use data-driven targeted strategies to recruit candidates. Implementation of the ACTIVATE® platform and the recruitment and marketing strategies will occur in Year 1 of the proposed project as indicated in the **detailed timeline** (Appendix A). Training will be offered to support staff as they learn the system, and user feedback will inform continuous improvement.

***Objective 2: Increase educator diversity in high-need schools (Aligns with Competitive Preference Priority #2)***

One of the core values of WCPSS is to create diverse school communities that are inviting, respectful, inclusive, flexible, and supportive. Achievement of this objective is especially critical in high-need schools, where in general and historically, demographic congruence--especially racial congruence--between students and both teachers and administrators tend to be low. A large body of literature documents the positive effect of racially/ethnically diverse educators for both student and educator outcomes. Students of color benefit from same-race teachers in terms of

short-run cognitive outcomes, such as test scores (Dee 2004; Dee 2005; Egalite, et al., 2015), and noncognitive outcomes, such as attitudes toward school (Egalite and Kisida, 2018). Same-race teachers also improve long-run student outcomes, such as high school graduation and college enrollment (Gershenson, et al. 2018). Moreover, same-race principals raise teacher retention and job satisfaction (Grissom 2011, Grissom and Keiser 2011), a critical benefit to high-needs schools that tend to face high levels of teacher turnover. In sum, diversification of the educator workforce benefits both students and educators, particularly in high-need schools.

***Objective 3: Growing a high-quality teacher pipeline, with the goal of raising the bar for teacher preparation; recruit highly effective teachers, and staff to support success for all students, especially at high-need schools (Aligns with Competitive Preference #1)***

WCPSS seeks to build its capacity to attract, recruit, hire, onboard, and retain the best and the brightest educators. Currently WCPSS has one full time recruiter for a district that has over 20,000 employees. With TSL grant funding, WCPSS will hire two additional staff to support the recruitment function within HR in Year 1. Increasing the recruitment office from one to three will enable HR to concentrate on initiatives that create talent pipelines with focus on diversity, equity and inclusion. Recruiters will build on partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other institutions of higher education (IHEs) with diverse teacher education candidates to develop a diverse applicant pool. Recruiters will collaborate with IHEs to define the qualities and skill sets needed for successful candidates and work with them to support and redefine the instructional methods of their coursework, resulting in better qualified candidates.

High-need schools are complex, and principals have many competing demands for their time and attention. Currently WCPSS principals drive the hiring process from start to finish for their schools. In addition to developing the teacher pipeline, Project LEADERS recruiters will lift some of the load for principals in high-need schools by developing an applicant pool of qualified

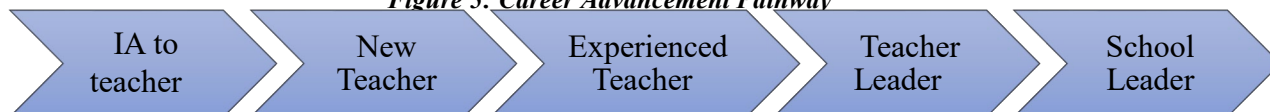
candidates from which the principals can interview. Recruiters will create a selection process, including a rigorous screening and interview process, that will place candidates (who must provide documented evidence of positive impact on student achievement, such as reference letters, performance evaluation data or other student effectiveness data, evidence of successful experience teaching in low performing schools, bilingual skills, etc.) into application pools from which school leaders may choose. Recruiters will also work with school leaders to offer best practices in hiring that will increase transparency and minimize implicit bias in selection and interviewing processes. With recruiters taking care of the initial screening and vetting of candidates, the hiring process will be streamlined for principals, who will be able to select candidates from the pool with confidence and hire based on the unique needs of their school.

***Objective 4: Promote and support a culture of continuous professional development that results in high student achievement (Aligns with Competitive Preference Priority #1)***

Project LEADERS will provide differentiated career pathways for educators across the WCPSS district. Teachers and instructional assistants will have multiple pathways for **career advancement and to help improve their instructional practice**. The **WCPSS Career Advancement Pathway** (see details of this pathway in Appendix F) serves as a model to ensure effective teachers remain in the classroom while equipping them for advanced leadership roles (see Figure 5). The advanced leadership roles in this pathway provide educators with new learning and growth opportunities to support current and future career steps. In addition to job embedded professional growth, educators serving at the high-need schools can advance their professional credentials and skills for licensure, National Board Certification and receive tuition assistance for an advanced degree. (e.g., MAT, MSA, EdD). The Career Advancement Pathway is “intentionally designed to...offer more meaningful increases in compensation for teachers, and

alter the primary responsibilities of the teacher rather than simply layering on additional duties” (BestNC, 2023).

*Figure 5: Career Advancement Pathway*



Successful districts develop and budget for appropriate professional development for teachers as they begin their new roles. Professional development should be tailored to the specific role. Professional development might also be utilized to help create a pipeline of teachers who are well-prepared to move into advanced leadership positions when they become available (BestNC, 2023). The PLP (see Appendix F for a detailed description) provides a comprehensive framework to engage teachers and instructional assistants in recurring professional development courses for consistent implementation to improve student achievement. The PLP includes core components that will enhance the capacity of teachers and instructional assistants to ensure they are equipped with the resources needed for professional growth. With its multi-year course design, the PLP is divided into seven core components (equity, curriculum & instruction, professional learning communities, building classroom culture, leadership, teacher residency, and global competency). Courses include, but are not limited to, Intro to Equity Policy, Social Emotional Learning, Restorative Practices, Cognitive Coaching, Adaptive Leadership, Crucial Conversations, and the opportunity to enroll in the CCTI-Wake Durham educator preparation program (for alternatively licensed teachers). The purpose of these courses is to improve classroom instructional quality and student outcomes.

### **Design of the Project LEADERS Performance-Based Compensation System (PBCS)**

The effectiveness of a PBCS in elevating student and educator outcomes is intimately tied to its design (Springer and Balch, 2010; Pham, Nguyen, and Springer, 2020). While studies of PBCS



have not yet identified the “optimal” design, the literature is sufficiently robust to suggest the right approach in practice. In this respect, Project LEADERS combines evidence-informed design elements to recruit, retain, and reward high-performing educators and schools in WCPSS’ highest-need elementary and middle schools. The following section defines Project LEADERS’ critical PBCS design features and the broader personnel and human capital management literature’s support of them. While the PBCS’s design and implementation stage will enable revisions based on stakeholder feedback and design analytics, the program’s following core features will comprise (a) incentive structure; (b) performance measures; (c) performance standards and thresholds; (d) size of incentive; and (e) and frequency of payouts. Under Project LEADERS, educators are eligible for the following recruitment and retention incentives:

**Table 4: Project LEADERS Incentives**

Who	Performance Base Compensation	Salary Differential (Recruitment & Retention)	Career Advancement/ Tuition Assistance
<b>Teachers</b>	\$2000 when meeting growth goals: Year 1: 13% Year 2: 15% Year 3: 18%	\$3,000	Up to \$5,000/year  <b>New Teacher (including Alternative Licensure &amp; Participate Learning Ambassador Teachers:</b> Reimbursement for continuing education through CCTI-Wake Durham toward teaching license, up to \$2,000 and \$500 state licensure exam costs  NCBT application fees up to \$1,900  <b>Experienced Teacher:</b> Tuition reimbursement at university partner school (up to \$5,000) for advanced degrees  <b>Teacher Leader/School Leader:</b>

			Tuition reimbursement at university partner school up to \$5,000 for advanced degrees. NCBT application fees up to \$1,900; state/national professional educator memberships up to \$500
<b>Para-professionals (IAs)</b>	\$2000 when meeting growth goals: Year 1: 13% Year 2: 15% Year 3: 18%	\$3,000	Up to \$2,500/year reimbursement for continuing education through CCTI-Wake Durham toward teaching license, up to \$2,000 and \$500 state licensure exam costs
<b>Principals</b>	\$2,000 when school meets growth goals: Year 1: 13% Year 2: 15% Year 3: 18%	\$5,000	Tuition reimbursement at university partner school up to \$5,000 for advanced degrees.
<b>Asst. Principals</b>	\$2,000 when school meets growth goals: Year 1: 13% Year 2: 15% Year 3: 18%	\$3,000	Tuition reimbursement at university partner school up to \$5,000 for advanced degrees.

While the existing literature proposes no clear “optimal” incentive size, that literature does establish actionable minimum (and, to a lesser extent, maximum) awards for each research-informed design feature found in Project LEADERS. WCPSS details these award amounts in the context of the unit of accountability levels defined above.

*Payout Frequency.* Payout frequency refers to the rate of award distribution and the time interval between the assessment of the incentivized activity and the distribution of the performance award. A growing literature in personnel economics suggests that incentives are most effective when the unit under observation is awarded with immediacy between action and reward. Most incentive programs in the education sector distribute awards annually, corresponding to the

academic year, often due to the timing of results from end-of-year assessments, which can often take until late fall or winter of the following school year, thus weakening the incentive effect. Given that the calculation of performance measures is notoriously slow, WCPSS anticipates contracting with an evaluator to explore if EVAAS and NCEES data can be accessed earlier so that summative educator and school-level performance measures, and overall outcomes, are produced on a timeline substantially faster than current practices.

***(iii) Methods of evaluation provide performance feedback and assessment of progress***

WCPSS will contract with an external evaluator/applied research and analytics firm to:

- Design and deploy an external program evaluation with both formative and summative feedback loops to rigorously measure and report on project implementation and impact.
- Implement a web-based decision support solution that includes dashboarding, visualizations, and tools to enable WCPSS to [a] identify specific talent needs at the subset of high-need schools selected for participation in Project LEADERS; [b] strategically manage the placement of leaders and teachers; [c] track year-over-year educator performance using a customizable model of educator evaluation and educator effectiveness predicated on multiple performance measures (e.g., student achievement and growth outcomes, observational outcomes, and summative performance evaluations); and [d] monitor program implementation and impact.

3. Design, develop, and produce [a] the educator and school-level performance measures, outcomes, and profiles; [b] program implementation and impact metrics and measures; and [c] other salient analytics requisites of Project LEADERS and the decision-support solution, from raw data collection, compilation, and diagnostics to summative educator evaluation scoring and reporting.


4. Conduct a feasibility study of the opportunity to further augment WCPSS' extant and proposed HCMS and PBCS strategies and structures through the data-informed, algorithmic matching of educators to high-need schools to ensure students have equitable access to educational resources and opportunities.

The evaluator will work directly with the WCPSS leadership team and other core Project LEADERS personnel to measure, monitor, and ultimately realize all project goals and objectives and offer a demonstrated track record of success in designing, developing, deploying, and sustaining equally comprehensive HCMS, PBCS, and decision-support solutions under large-scale, federally funded projects serving diverse high-need schools and school districts.

#### **Quality of Management Plan**

WCPSS has a track record of successfully implementing large federal grants. In addition to receiving a number of grants through the Magnet School Assistance Program and other Department of Education programs, WCPSS also received a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant in 2010. The TIF grant allowed the district to implement systemic reforms for one Title 1 school. The goals of the grant, which were to reward effective teachers and school leadership (principals and assistant principals), provided greater professional opportunities to educators, improve student performance, and close the achievement gap within the school, were largely met and WCPSS implemented the project with fidelity.

Project LEADERS will be led by the Human Resources Department and supported by leaders from the Department of Technology, the Superintendent's Leadership Team, Academics, the Office of Equity Affairs, and the Office of Professional Learning.

 currently serves as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources for WCPSS. In this role he has led the department to increase efficiencies by expanding use of digital tools. He will oversee the selection of the HCMS vendor and work with

the Chief Financial Officer and Board of Education on purchasing and contracts. He will be the primary liaison to the Superintendent's Leadership Team (SLT). This project will require approximately 15% of his time on a monthly basis.

██████████ Senior Director of Talent Management, will co-lead the grant with ██████████ and will serve as the project manager. ██████████ has been a leader in Human Resources for the last seven years, and prior to this, she served as a school principal, assistant principal, and teacher. She has successfully implemented a professional learning program for administrative interns and new school principals. She is also responsible for their onboarding and support throughout their residencies and first year(s) of leadership. Her knowledge of teacher and leader development will be critical during the design and implementation of the teacher support teams for the high-needs schools identified in the grant. She will work closely with the school principals to align the necessary resources and professional learning for teachers to meet and/or exceed achievement measures for students. As the co-leader of Project LEADERS, ██████████ will oversee the grant management team and be responsible for the planning, design, and implementation of the project's objectives, dedicating 50% of her time to this grant.

██████████ Director of Talent Acquisition, has **served as the only recruiter for WCPSS since 2017.** ██████████ is responsible for sourcing, recruiting, and onboarding all employment areas, including nearly 11,000 teachers. He works closely with area superintendents and school principals to increase early hires for high-need schools and has transitioned career fairs from in-person to virtual. ██████████ will be instrumental in working with the new Director of Talent Management Acquisition, with the iCIMS platform, and in working with the recruitment and advertising agency to implement the new ACTIVATE platform. He will ensure that marketing and advertising strategies are aligned to district needs by providing the critical data

needed to identify talent and increase the diversity of teacher and leadership applicants. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] will train and supervise the two grant funded recruiters. This grant will require 100% of [REDACTED] time.

[REDACTED] currently serves as the Administrator for Teacher Talent and Retention. She has served WCPSS and a neighboring school district for more than 16 years as a recruiter and a director responsible for staffing. [REDACTED] pioneered the development and implementation of an internal recruitment tool called Future Teachers; she facilitates the district's Student Teaching and Internship Program and fosters the growth of student teachers through a professional development series called Student Teacher University (STU). Additionally, [REDACTED] serves as National Board Certification coordinator for WCPSS. [REDACTED] will work closely with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] as she continues to oversee the district's National Board Certification support program, the Future Teachers Program, the Student Teaching and Internship Program, and Student Teacher University (STU). Due to the overlap between her current work and this project, approximately 100% of [REDACTED] work will be dedicated to the grant.

A grant coordinator (100% grant funded) will be hired to assist [REDACTED] in project management. The grant coordinator will support planning, implementing and managing the project activities, and monitoring timelines and milestones to ensure that project objectives are met. This position will be responsible for ensuring the completion of all required grant reporting.

A Director of Talent Acquisition (25%) will be hired and a part of their job duties will involve working with [REDACTED] to oversee the iCIMS applicant tracking system and work with the recruitment and advertising agency to provide oversight of the ACTIVATE® platform and social media marketing services.

A grant evaluator (100% grant funded) will be hired to create a detailed evaluation design, develop timelines, identify and develop data collection tools and systems, and implement the evaluation processes for the duration of the grant. The evaluator will be supervised by staff in the Data, Research, and Accountability department.

Two recruiters (Senior Administrators) (100% grant funded) will come onboard to assist [REDACTED] with enhancements to the recruiting processes. They will assist with training district staff on new recruitment tools, best practices in interviewing and hiring, developing relationships with teacher preparation programs to grow the teacher pipeline and create an applicant pool.

Two coordinating teachers (100% grant funded) will provide intensive support for mentor and beginning teachers, and support individual teachers and instructional assistants who are seeking additional credentials.

Resumes and job descriptions for grant funded personnel can be found in Appendix B and F.

### **Adequacy of Resources**

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

Project LEADERS is an extension of the current initiatives within the district. While WCPSS is a large district, and change can take time, the goal and objectives of this grant are in direct alignment with the district's new strategic plan. As a result, the reforms and improvements that will be realized through the implementation of Project LEADERS will coordinate with and be supported by other work already underway within the state and district (DRIVE Task Force, PEPSC, WCPSS Strategic Plan and Equity Policy, and the Retention and Recruitment Core Team—see Appendix F). This project will:

- Increase ability to communicate with internal and external candidates about employment, career opportunities, and advancement opportunities

- Develop applicant pipelines and pools of highly qualified candidates
- Expand support for teachers and instructional assistants to gain credentials and grow professionally
- Create and implement a PBCS that incentivizes highly qualified educators to work in high-need schools
- Support the transformation of school cultures and develop communities of practice that improve instructional effectiveness
- Embed professional growth for educators in high-need schools
- Offer networks of support to principals that result in more time for them to focus on instructional leadership, professional growth, and coaching.

In addition, the PLP, Future Teachers Program, CCTI-Wake Durham, and other initiatives demonstrate WCPSS' investment in teacher and leadership development to recruit, retain, and develop educators in high-need schools.

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

Assistant superintendents, area superintendents, educators, central services leadership and staff, human resources, Office of Professional Learning, Data, Research, and Accountability (DRA), WCPSS Grants Office, and a Distinguished Professor of UNC-Chapel Hill formed a planning committee for this project. This committee met on a weekly basis to develop this project to improve student achievement in the lowest-performing schools and identify best practices to recruit, retain, and reward teachers and school leaders to serve in high-need schools. Through meetings and listening sessions, the committee drew on input from principals, teachers, and Wake North Carolina Association of Educators, the local **teacher union/advocacy organization** (see



letter of support in Appendix C) to successfully develop and implement a sustainable PBCS for the district's most qualified teachers and school leaders.

WCPSS maintains strong partnerships with universities and community organizations and plans to build on those relationships to strengthen the quality, diversity, and number of applicants in the pipeline.

**Table 5: Demonstrated Commitment of Local Partners (all letters of support and MOUs in Appendix C)**

University and Community Partners	Partnership
North Carolina State University (NCSU)	WCPSS and NCSU have worked closely for the past 7 years on the Wallace Foundation's \$47M initiative to help prepare future principals; currently partnering with WCPSS in both their teacher and principal preparation program to develop teachers and school leaders.
University of North Carolina Chapel-Hill (UNC-CH)	WCPSS regularly hosts interns and student teachers at UNC-CH for the Future Teachers Program.
North Carolina Central University (NCCU), Historically Black College and University (HBCU)	WCPSS regularly hosts interns and student teachers at NCCU for the Future Teachers Program.
North Carolina Governor's DRIVE (Developing a Representative and Inclusive Vision for Education) Task Force	WCPSS' work aligns with their current initiatives to diversify the K-12 teacher workforce in North Carolina.
Alliance of Black Educators-Wake County	WCPSS' work aligns with their current initiatives to diversify the K-12 teacher workforce in North Carolina.
Wake North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE)	Partner to significantly impact teacher preparation and recruitment, diversity selection, staffing, and hiring to ensure a more inclusive talent pipeline.
WakeEd Partnership	Supports the work of WCPSS to develop critical leaders to support student and academic success
CCTI-Wake Durham	Partnership with <b>Durham Public Schools to administer courses</b> such as General Education, Elementary Education, and Exceptional Children Pathways. WCPSS serves as fiscal agent for this EPP.

***(iii) Extent to which the applicant demonstrates it has the resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant***

In August of 2013, the NC State Legislature eliminated salary increases for teachers who earned advanced degrees (Master's and Doctorate) except for teachers who completed one course toward their degree prior to this date. They were exempt from the new law provided they completed the requirements for the degrees and continue to be paid on those degrees. North Carolina became the **first state in the country** to remove salary increases for educators with advanced degrees, as legislators contended that teachers with master's degrees are no more effective at raising student test scores than teachers with bachelor's degrees. This decision eliminated the 10% pay increase teachers receive when earning a master's or advanced degree. In addition, the General Assembly ended teacher tenure and eliminated a cap on class size (Sorrells, 2019).



***Figure 6: Number of employees paid at the advanced degree level***  
***Source: WCPSS Human Resources***

As Figure 6 indicates, WCPSS currently pays **5,439** employees at the master's, advanced, or doctoral degree levels. Beginning **July 1, 2023**, WCPSS will allocate **\$4.4 million** in available recurring local funding to pay employees who missed the August 1, 2013 state deadline for their relevant master's, advanced, and doctoral degrees. This will impact an estimated 650 employees including: **teachers**, social workers, speech language pathologists, audiologists, guidance counselors, and psychologists. Reinstatement of advanced degree pay demonstrates WCPSS

commitment to educators as the General Assembly has not taken action to restore this benefit statewide (Schlemmer, 2023). Human Resources has established an ongoing process to allow employees to report their relevant degrees for review and consideration.

Project LEADERS is designed to leverage resources across the district to affordably enhance the quality of teacher preparation in the region. **A multi-year financial plan for Project**

**LEADERS involves:**

**Years 1-3:** Project is funded by Teacher and School Leader Grant Funds and matching funds from WCPSS.

**Year 4 and ongoing:** Project LEADERS is sustained by the district's commitment of utilizing up to \$7 million in Title II funds (these federal funds will supplement and **not supplant**. This amount represents approximately the amount currently budgeted for the PBCS in this application), Restart funds, and recurring local funds. In addition, the district anticipates applying for funding through the North Carolina Advanced Teaching Roles Pilot Program. This competitive grant program allocates funds to opt-in districts that want to implement advanced teaching role models to recruit and retain teachers. The district's commitment to this project is reflected in the **\$15, 604, 425** in matching support for Project LEADERS. The project was built to directly address the major priorities of WCPSS and the deep needs that are found in high-need schools. Investments recruiting and retaining educators through incentives, professional growth, and supporting infrastructure are critical to our future success and the goals of this project.

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