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LEAD DeSoto (Leadership Excellence, Achievement, and Development) Project

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Introduction/Response to Priorities

DeSoto Independent School District (DeSoto ISD) serves students and families within the diverse and growing communities of Glenn Heights and DeSoto, Texas. The DeSoto student body is composed primarily of African American (73.2%) and Hispanic (21.4%) students, the majority of whom are economically disadvantaged. As of the end of the 2020-2021 school year, 79.1% of students are economically disadvantaged (**Absolute Priority 2**). In recent years, DeSoto has faced many challenges including leadership turnover, financial insolvency, school closures and a sharp decline in formerly high academic performance. In 2017 when the state Texas Education Agency (TEA) began rolling out the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) academic accountability system, DeSoto was the lowest-performing school district in North Texas, receiving a state rating of 67 (D). This has led to concerns about the long-term sustainability of DeSoto ISD and the impact the district's challenges are having on the city of DeSoto and its surrounding community.

After many years of tumultuous change, DeSoto has appointed new district leadership focused on a renewed mission to ensure that every student, without exception, learns and grows at the highest level. DeSoto ISD is a first-time applicant for the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSL), and is grounded in a strategic plan that prioritizes the commitment to develop extraordinary people. The LEAD DeSoto (Leadership Excellence, Achievement, and Development) project will develop and implement a new human capital management system (HCMS) that allows DeSoto ISD to build a talented and diverse leadership workforce. Components of the project include a review of current HR practices related to recruitment, hiring, selection, and retention, as well as the development of a leadership pipeline, strengthening of a leader evaluation system tied to student outcomes, a performance-based compensation system (PBCS), and a leadership development system grounded in a strong vision

for instructional leadership that also leverages job-embedded coaching (**Absolute Priority 1**). DeSoto ISD will partner with TNTP, Inc. to assist in meeting the goals of this project.

As detailed in Project Design section B.1, LEAD DeSoto is designed to use evidence-based strategies to increase the number and percentage of well-prepared, experienced, effective, and diverse leaders. The pipeline development approach will include refining the district's recruitment, selection and staffing process to support DeSoto schools in recruiting and hiring instructional leaders. A system of career pathways and the development of an aspiring leaders program will expand efforts to support and develop talented individuals to serve as instructional coaches, principals, or school leaders. Additionally, implementation of a new leader evaluation system tied to student outcomes will serve as a strategy for retaining the most effective instructional leaders (**Competitive Preference Priority 1**). As detailed in Project Design section B.1, the project will also contribute to improved recruitment, outreach, preparation, support, development, and retention of a diverse educator workforce. Pipeline strategies and new human capital practices adopted will be focused on goals related to building district leadership that mirrors the growing Hispanic student population. Human capital leaders will be reflecting on, evaluating, and strengthening their practices with a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens to address any systematic barriers or biases that prevent leaders of color, and specifically Hispanic leaders, from applying and/or being hired into leadership positions. Additionally, a new system of professional learning for leaders focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion will ensure DeSoto implements high-quality professional development that fosters an inclusive and supportive school climate for diverse leaders (**Competitive Preference Priority 2**).

Nine out of 10 DeSoto campuses will participate in project implementation (the DeSoto Alternative Education Program will not be included in the project), and because all participating

schools are considered high-need, the project will inherently concentrate activities on leaders serving high-need schools. Included below is a list of all participating schools, including the most recently available school-level student data to support each school's designation as a high-need school (**Absolute Priority 2**).

List of Participating High-Need Schools	
Participating School	% Economically Disadvantaged*
DeSoto High School	75.97%
West Middle School	78.3%
McCowan Middle School	79.03%
Cockrell Hill Elementary School	74.43%
Frank Moates Elementary School	81.03%
Katherine Johnson Technology Magnet Academy (TMA)	71.74
Ruby Young Personalized STEAM Academy (PSA)	77.59%
The Meadows Elementary School	81.16%
Woodbridge Elementary School	79.57%
<i>*The Texas Education Agency defines an economically disadvantaged student as one who is eligible for FRPL.</i>	

A. NEED FOR PROJECT

A.1 Extent to which specific gaps or weaknesses in service, infrastructure, or opportunities have been identified and will be addressed by the proposed project, including the nature and magnitude of those gaps or weaknesses.

Historically, limited focus has been placed within DeSoto schools on the role of leaders and their impact on school culture and student outcomes. And although leadership is second to teaching (among school-related factors) on its ability to positively impact student learning and performance (Leithwood, et al, 2010), DeSoto currently has no structured HCMS in place that could elevate the need for great leaders that cultivate great schools. In 2018 the DeSoto ISD Board of Trustees appointed [REDACTED] as Superintendent, who with new cabinet leadership in place began unpacking the financial, school culture, and academic achievement challenges that had plagued the district. In the fall of 2020, the TEA appointed a conservator to assist with Board of Trustee governance in pursuit of addressing staffing, finance, and academic

performance issues. As popularly quoted, Marcus Aurelius said, “what stands in the way becomes the way” - for many years a lack of support for and inconsistent expectations of school leaders has led to a weak culture that [REDACTED] his team are focused on addressing through an intentional district redesign. Thus, the opportunity to receive support through the TSL Program comes at a time when the district is closely examining the key gaps and weaknesses in the make-up of its school leadership.

In Spring 2020, DeSoto ISD wrapped up an intensive, months-long strategic planning process which included a detailed landscape analysis inclusive of interviews with key stakeholders – administrators, faculty/staff, parents, students, and community members. Feedback and perspectives provided by participants during the assessment of the DeSoto landscape resulted in several key themes. Digging into each theme, trends in the feedback provided by interviewees help to demonstrate weaknesses in the district’s organizational culture, and specifically as noted in Table 1.1 below illustrate gaps in the role and consistency of strong leadership throughout the district.

Table 1.1 DeSoto ISD Landscape Analysis Themes and Trends	
<u>Theme</u>	<u>Trends</u>
Historical Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness and transparency have historically been lacking. • Weaknesses in DeSoto’s staffing infrastructure have left administrators questioning what the district values in skilled leadership and educators. • Recent round of firings (during administration transition in 2018) have left staff feeling fearful.
Resources and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrators expressed a need for more high-quality teachers, while teachers indicate needing more support from administrators. • Staff experience a wide variance in the level of support and outreach that they get from their administrator. • Community perception is that Principal profile is a factor in determining the resources that trickle down to students (<i>implying that there are inconsistencies in how school leaders ensure students receive needed supports</i>)

Trust Building, Communication and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent leadership turnover has been challenging for staff, who indicate they are looking for stability. • There is inconsistency in school culture, and principal/leadership support at each campus.
Knowledge Sharing and Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision making is often done behind closed doors, and both leadership and staff are looking for clear communication and transparency on decisions being made. • Administrators express challenges in being asked to balance big picture responsibilities and day-to-day needs of the school.

A key takeaway from this landscape analysis is the need for a stable, robust pipeline of instructional leaders that can help to mitigate fears and provide the stability that educators crave. During the transition to a new Superintendent and cabinet, DeSoto experienced significant leadership turnover with all schools currently being led by an administrator newer to the district. Dating back to the 2018-2019 school year, no principal has been with a DeSoto school for more than four years. Additionally, seven out of nine principals at participating schools are new to the district as of the impending school year, and eight out of nine are new to their school. The only principal not new to their school has served in that role for only three complete years. DeSoto ISD was an early adopter of the Texas Principal Evaluation & Support System (TPESS), used to evaluate and appraise principals, identify performance strengths and support gaps, and provide constructive feedback. TPESS data from the 2020-2021 school year rated only 25% of principals as Proficient, and only 8% as Accomplished.

While it may not be surprising that DeSoto has faced such high leadership turnover in light of the historical turbulence the district has gone through, the magnitude of frequent leadership turnover has a dramatic impact on school progress. Persistent leadership turnover can disrupt so many aspects of school success, often resulting in higher teacher turnover which then negatively impacts student achievement (Levin, Bradley, & Scott, 2019). Additionally, according to research from the Learning Policy Institute, “schools with higher percentages of students from low-income families, students of color, and low-performing students are more likely to

experience principal turnover”. It is imperative that the LEAD DeSoto project implement systems that both increase and retain a pipeline of effective leaders. Not only will this proposed project focus on growing a sustainable leader pipeline, but it will also allow DeSoto to evaluate its current HR systems and practices that stand in the way of filling leadership vacancies effectively and without disruption to school year demands. Currently, DeSoto does not have a strong existing pipeline of qualified candidates for leadership positions that they can quickly tap into when vacancies arise.

In May 2020, DeSoto ISD partnered with TNTP to conduct an analysis of teacher evaluation processes within the district in preparation for the launch of a new performance-based compensation system (PBCS) for teachers. The results of this analysis, in addition to the perspectives provided in the landscape analysis trends in Table 1.1 above, demonstrate inconsistencies within the district in how leader effectiveness is evaluated. This is inclusive of inconsistencies in the expectations that leaders have for teachers, the level and frequency of support that they provide to staff, and ultimately the potency of resources that flow down to students. TNTP’s analysis found that while DeSoto was utilizing a nationally recognized and research-based teacher evaluation rubric (the district was an early adopter of T-TESS), leaders were inconsistent in implementing systems that help teachers understand evaluation results and ultimately the performance tier in which they fell. Teachers indicated receiving inconsistent notifications and support from their leader regarding their performance tier, and depending on the strength of the system that the campus leader implemented, many teachers were surprised to learn where they stood when it came to summative evaluations. For leaders, the district did not publish standard quantitative benchmarks for the use of walkthrough or student data, leaving it largely up to individual leaders how standards are applied in their buildings. Also, tier levels

were not formally tracked, making accountability a challenge. In order for teachers to successfully meet expectations, they need support from leaders. Communication gaps between leaders and teachers has contributed to evaluation and accountability challenges. Similarly, TNTP's analysis demonstrates that DeSoto is struggling with gaps in standardizing leader expectations district-wide, resulting in disconnection between leader performance and student outcomes. The design of a leader evaluation system aligned with improved school-based outcomes and culture will help to address these gaps.

As previously noted, DeSoto recently implemented a PBCS for teachers that ties teacher compensation to achieving student outcomes, however there is no equivalent system in place for leadership roles (Principal, Assistant Principal, Instructional Coaches). Due in part to the lack of a leadership pipeline and few formal opportunities for effective leaders to be retained on a career path, DeSoto has had zero Assistant Principals promoted to the principal role in the last two school year cycles. Table 1.2 below provides a compensation comparison for leadership roles at DeSoto ISD as well as neighboring school districts in North Texas.

Table 1.2 North Texas Regional Compensation Comparison						
	Principals			Assistant Principals		
	<i>Elem</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>HS</i>	<i>Elem</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>HS</i>
Dallas ISD	<i>Magnet</i> \$100,000 - \$120,000	<i>Magnet</i> \$103,000 - \$126,000	<i>Early College</i> \$105,00 - \$136,000	\$70,000 - \$90,000	\$74,500 - \$94,500	<i>Magnet</i> \$76,500 - \$95,500
	<i>Traditional</i> \$102,000 - \$124,000	<i>Traditional</i> \$107,000 - \$138,000	<i>Magnet</i> \$110,000 - \$144,000			<i>Traditional</i> \$78,500 - \$102,500
			<i>Traditional</i>			

			\$120,000 - \$150,000			
Cedar Hill	\$84,005 - \$104,940	\$93,790 - \$117,581	\$98,251 - \$132,895	\$61,092 - \$83,955	\$64,441 - \$90,302	\$66,880 - \$92,760
DeSoto ISD	\$80,153 - \$112,290	\$88,969 - \$124,641	\$107,872 - \$145,917	\$58,842 - \$82,436	\$62,373 - \$87,383	\$68,351 - \$95,758
Duncanville ISD	\$79,622 - \$109,622	\$89,042 - \$119,172	\$103,847 - \$133,516	\$62,536 - \$88,154	\$66,170 - \$92,700	\$68,815 - \$96,409
Lancaster ISD*	\$77,534 - \$108,175	\$83,735 - \$116,831	\$93,785 - \$130,849	\$59,630 - \$83,195	\$62,909 - \$87,707	\$68,993 - \$96,178

*Based on 2020-2021 compensation plan. Plan for 2021-2022 not published yet.

While DeSoto compensation is about the average in the region, it is important to note that districts like Cedar Hill and Dallas, in close proximity to DeSoto, offer competitive compensation for leaders. Dallas ISD, the largest school district in the region, has been implementing a PBCS for school leaders for approximately seven years. Highly effective teachers and leaders looking for employment in North Texas have opportunities to use their talents at districts that will recognize and reward their effectiveness, and compensate them accordingly. And compensation rates at other districts could contribute to lower retention rates particularly when considering the challenges that DeSoto has faced in providing appropriate supports to leaders that, when paired with appropriate compensation, can lead to job satisfaction. This undoubtedly sets the bar for DeSoto in developing their own compensation structure that distinguishes effective leaders. Research has indicated a correlation between leadership turnover and compensation. A study conducted in New York schools found that schools offering salaries within the lowest tiers were almost 10 times as likely to lose their principal than those with higher salary tiers (Papa, 2007). More competitive compensation rates that target and incentivize effective leaders will not completely remediate the gaps in effective leadership at DeSoto, but when combined with other components of the LEAD DeSoto project could be useful in building the workforce that students and teachers deserve.

Not only are the vast majority of DeSoto's current leaders' novice to their role in the district, but for many years disparities in leadership at the district level have left leaders without the support systems they need to be successful. In December 2018 a Chief of Schools was hired and then left the position by December 2019. The district existed with no qualified individual in this position from January 2020 through September 2020. During that time, school leaders were not receiving dependable support including access to professional development and coaching; as noted in the landscape analysis trends, common challenges amongst leaders include lack of clear and transparent communication on decision-making from the district, as well as a lack of support needed to help leaders feel as though they can do their job effectively. Recent research from the New York City Leadership Academy (2019) supports the benefits of coaching for novice principals, noting that leadership coaching helped to increase principal tenure to more than twice the national average, and improved the leader's ability to lead school improvement (Drucker, Grossman, & Nagler, 2018). A key component of the LEAD DeSoto project will focus on ensuring a systemic approach to improving leadership across the district by focusing on ongoing professional learning and job-embedded coaching and development.

A.2 Extent to which project will integrate with or build on similar or related efforts to improve Relevant Outcomes using existing funding streams from other programs or policies supported by community, State, and Federal resources.
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DeSoto has recently developed a local designation plan and been approved by the state of Texas to receive funding as part of a Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) initiative, with a stated goal of a six-figure salary for teachers who prioritize teaching in high need areas. This new initiative, made possible with the passage of House Bill 3 by the 86th Texas Legislature in June of 2019, has supported DeSoto in developing and implementing a PBCS for teachers.

Components of the system include:

- New evaluation/local designation system: teacher observation, student growth, and student perception are used to evaluate teachers
- New proposed teacher pay structure: base salary provided to all teaching staff, with additional stipends and incentive allotments available based on demonstrated student outcomes and aligned with the state's new TIA system.
- Designation levels: Under the TIA system, teachers can earn up to 3 levels of designation (recognized, exemplary, and master) that increase salary and are transferable between districts.
- Systems of support to improve teacher effectiveness including: consistent evaluator developing & norming, an aligned model for monitoring & coaching, high-quality professional learning opportunities, and a personalized professional learning plan for each teacher.

Implementation of this new system starting in the fall will help the district take advantage of state funding available to support this plan. This system is the foundation for the HCMS and PBCS that are proposed as part of this project, giving DeSoto the opportunity to use this as a building block for leader development systems.

In September 2020, the Texas Education Agency appointed a Conservator as a result of a district investigation that brought to light the financial, governance, and academic achievement challenges that the district had been experiencing. A primary role of the Conservator is to work with the Board of Trustees and district administration to develop corrective action plans that address identified issues. In light of past ineffective leadership, a number of the objectives and progress measures outlined in these plans are intertwined with this proposal – as district administration has worked through these plans with the Conservator, they begin to lay the

foundation for elements of the LEAD DeSoto project. Relevant progress measures outlined in the corrective action plans include: 1) Providing bi-monthly targeted professional development and coaching support for educators on district curriculum and high-yield instructional strategies, 2) Establishing and maintaining district HR-focused policies, programs, and initiatives effectively and efficiently, and 3) Establishing a quarterly employee feedback review tool for employee retention as well as a requirement to decrease the voluntary employee turnover rate by 5% for the '20-'21 school year. Many of the requirements outlined in the corrective action plans, already underway and/or in final completion stages, will be integrated into and enhanced by this project.

Additionally, through the TEA's Lone Star Governance initiative, the Board of Trustees has undergone extensive training to develop a continuous improvement model for the district, focused on improving student outcomes. As a part of this process, the Board developed a set of goals and Superintendent Constraints in December 2020 that correlate with the proposed activities of this project. Superintendent Constraint 1 states: The superintendent will not allow educator evaluations that aren't primarily based on student growth data aligned to the board's student outcome goals or that lack a student feedback component. The board has set associated progress measures and a timeline for implementation of this constraint, and the strengthening of DeSoto's leadership evaluation system, as proposed in this project, will build on existing continuous improvements underway.

Other existing/available funding streams that will align with this project include an approximately \$3 million, 3-year STEM grant that DeSoto ISD received from Educate Texas, funded by Texas Instruments. Though the primary focus of the project is on STEM education, an aspect of the proposed work focuses on developing leaders with a strong instruction lens particularly in STEM-related subjects. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) offers a principal

residency grant program that seeks to provide LEAs with an opportunity to increase the number of well-prepared, diverse instructional leaders by building principal/leadership pipelines through quality principal residency programs. DeSoto intends to apply for this state funding in the next grant period, with a new lens focused on the activities outlined in the LEAD DeSoto project.

DeSoto ISD's strategic planning and visioning process rested on a landscape analysis that included collaboration with and input from diverse stakeholders. The trends that emerged from stakeholder interviews informed the newly-released strategic plan, and ultimately the strategies proposed in this project. DeSoto ISD has focused significant attention on building community partnerships with an understanding that school districts cannot root out and address systemic issues in a silo. In that vein, DeSoto applied for and received in 2019 a Community Partnerships grant from TEA that includes collaboration with the municipalities of Glenn Heights and DeSoto, University of North Texas – Dallas, and Methodist Charlton Medical Center to conduct a full-scale city and school district redesign. These partners have worked together to identify core systemic issues that negatively impact outcomes and perpetuate the issues that hold back the school district and the communities. This project has helped to fund the strategic planning and visioning process that has given clear direction and a path forward to addressing leadership challenges. Additionally, key objectives outlined in the project overlap with the proposed objectives outlined in this application, ultimately focusing on increasing school accountability ratings and improving STAAR ratings for DeSoto students. This collaboration will be key to the success of the LEAD DeSoto project (see Appendix C for a letter of support from the collaborative partners). DeSoto is participating alongside the grant partners in the development of the "North Star" partnership, a joint effort that will become its own 501(c)3 to sustain this work beyond the initial TEA grant period. Particularly relevant to the focus this project puts on

developing a strong leader pipeline, DeSoto ISD will be leaning on UNT-Dallas to help provide a pipeline of qualified teachers and leaders. The partnership developed through this grant is establishing the foundation for strategy building for training educators into effective leaders.

A.3 Extent to which the proposed project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards for students.

The foundation for the LEAD DeSoto project, and the fundamental activities that will address these gaps and weaknesses identified, begins with DeSoto ISD's new strategic plan: "Be the Future", through which DeSoto ISD has adopted seven commitments that encompass the aspirations of the district. Strategic commitment number four, "Develop Extraordinary People", is directly aligned with and informed by the insufficiencies in the district's leadership workforce. Within this commitment, the district has further refined key priorities as listed below.

Table 1.3 Strategic Commitment #4 Priorities, "Develop Extraordinary People"	
1.	Recruit extraordinary people
2.	Build a robust leadership pipeline.
3.	Align all evaluation & compensation systems to achieving student outcomes and our district vision.
4.	Create a system that allows our best teachers to choose to stay in the classroom.
5.	Adopt and implement an aligned model for monitoring and coaching for student learning.
6.	Ensure a personalized professional learning plan for every employee.
7.	Maintain a comprehensive system of high-quality professional learning opportunities.
8.	Create cohesive experiences for staff that align with district values.
9.	Retain extraordinary people.

Though the historical context is challenging, this new strategic plan ushers in an opportunity for DeSoto to focus on talent and leadership development as a central component of a larger district approach to improving teaching, leadership, and improved student outcomes. The above priorities are a key aspect of the district's vision for radical change and demonstrate renewed emphasis being placed on the power of extraordinary leadership to transform schools from the top down.

Under the direction of Superintendent Dr. Weaver, the district has been restructured to align with the TEA's Effective Schools Framework (ESF), which provides districts and schools with a clear vision and direction to ensure success. The ESF includes a set of proven, research-based strategies for districts to implement and defines "5 Levers" that are essential in high performing campuses: 1) Strong School Leadership and Planning, 2) Strategic Staffing, 3) Positive School Culture, 4) High-Quality Instructional Materials and Assessments, and 5) Effective Instruction. Within each lever is a set of district commitments outline what LEAs must do to ensure success, as well as essential actions to be taken to support powerful teaching and learning. There is significant overlap between the directives provided in the ESF and the strategies DeSoto intends to implement through this proposed project.

Other current and related efforts focused on improving teaching and learning include a focus on rolling out a new, high-quality curriculum. Commitment #2 of the DeSoto strategic plan speaks to this focus on building a rigorous curriculum and transformation of the student experience through inclusive, student-centered teaching and learning. Priorities within this strategic plan commitment are geared toward ensuring that all students have access to grade-appropriate, high-quality instructional materials. TNTP's *The Opportunity Myth* (2018) found that many students, particularly students of color and low-income students, do not have access to high-quality instruction every day. DeSoto's current focus on implementing high-quality curriculum will help to improve classroom experiences, however research shows that school leadership is essential to creating positive classroom environments for students (Education Policy Center at AIR, 2017). The comprehensive approach of pairing a stronger curriculum with more effective leadership will help ensure successful outcomes. For the start of the 2021 school year, DeSoto created and began hiring for a new Instructional Coach position. Leaders serving in

this role will support teachers by providing coaching, data analysis, and will assist in diagnosing students' instructional needs. The Instructional Coaches will also design and provide professional development for teachers and lead PLCs ultimately focused on teacher support, coaching, and development. The fundamental goal of developing these new job opportunities is to help put teachers in a better position to comprehensively address students' academic needs, and to contribute to a workplace culture designed around a network of support, collaboration, and continual growth. Aspects of the LEAD DeSoto project will enhance these initial efforts by building and strengthening systems to support and retain individuals serving in this new instructional leadership capacity.

The district restructuring has also led to the creation of new departments – the department of Research, Evaluation, & Design is focused on creating and managing data systems to better track and evaluate student achievement, and a new Student Support department is focused on facilitating a positive school culture and SEL for all students. Indicative of the laser focus on student achievement, DeSoto ISD has restructured its campuses, moving to a model in which Pre-K through second grade schools feed into third through fifth grade centers, which then feed directly into middle and high school. This change has helped to shrink age bands within schools, better track student progress, and ensure that evaluations of improved student achievement are appropriate for the age band.

There is evidence that these comprehensive efforts to improve teaching and learning are having a positive impact at DeSoto. The district has been conducting teacher and staff surveys twice a year, tracking and analyzing responses in Panorama. Comparing results from fall 2018 through spring 2021 shows moderate improvements in the percentage of favorable responses related to staff perceptions of topics such as: feedback and coaching, professional learning, and

school climate. Consider for example the perceptions amongst teachers and staff of the overall social and learning climate of the school: in winter 2018, the percent of favorable responses was 39%, and by fall 2020 those results increased to 44%. The LEAD DeSoto project will only further enhance and strengthen efforts underway to transform the district.

A.4 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.

DeSoto schools are representative of a unique and evolving student body, facing significant challenges in meeting state academic standards. The DeSoto ISD student body is 73.2% Black, 21.4% Hispanic, 2.9% Multi-Racial, 2.1% White, and 0.4% Other. DeSoto educates one of the highest rates of foster children in Texas, representative of 3.1% of the student population at the end of the '20-'21 school year. 8.6% of the student population have limited English proficiency, and 11% of students receive special education services. The most significant need of DeSoto students is demonstrated through the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) results. And although academic ratings for the district have improved since the initial rating system was implemented, nearly half of the campuses in the district still do not meet state standards. Table 1.4 below shows the percentage of students at each DeSoto campus who were rated at the "Meets Grade Level" performance label. District-wide, composite data in 2021 show that 46% of DeSoto students were rated at the "Approaches Grade Level" performance label, 21% of students were rated at the "Meets Grade Level" performance label, and 6% of students were rated at the "Masters Grade Level" performance label.

Table 1.4: Campus STAAR Composite "Meets Grade Level" Rates	
DeSoto High School	28%
West Middle School	17%
McCowan Middle School	19%
Cockrell Hill Elementary School	25%
Frank Moates Elementary School	11%
Katherine Johnson Technology Magnet Academy (TMA)	43%

Ruby Young Personalized STEAM Academy (PSA)	9%
The Meadows Elementary School	16%
Woodbridge Elementary School	13%

These are the baseline measures of student achievement against which evaluations of improved performance will be made as the project progresses. What is most compelling in absorbing this performance data for DeSoto is how students are significantly underperforming compared to state averages. In spring 2021, the TEA released updated STAAR results for the state: 43% of Texas students were rated at the “Meets” label in reading assessments, and 35% were rated at the “Meets” label in math assessments. The data provided in Table 1.4 above clearly demonstrates a significant gap in student achievement at DeSoto, however the promising outcomes of LEAD DeSoto anticipate the need for a renewed focus on strong, quality instructional leadership for teachers and students. Understanding the academic needs of the target population, DeSoto ISD intends to implement this project with a focus on creating and implementing sustainable systems and structures that help to identify, support, and retain highly effective leaders. But it will be critical for DeSoto to also consider school culture and the many years of unclear and inconsistent vision for leaders that has created a disconnect between student achievement and the level and quality of support that leaders offer to teachers in their instructional practices. Taking into consideration the needs of a diverse student body at DeSoto and the goals of this project that focus on building a more diverse leader workforce, aspirations for building an inclusive and equitable school culture for staff, students, and the community will be key.

B. QUALITY OF THE PROJECT DESIGN

B.1 Extent to which proposed project Demonstrates a Rationale and includes a thorough, high-quality review of the relevant literature, a high-quality plan for implementation, and the use of appropriate methodological tools to ensure successful achievement of project objectives.

The intentional design of the LEAD DeSoto project rests on a significant research base that draws connections between leadership effectiveness and student performance, as well as the role of principals and APs as instructional leaders, who not only direct and administer the

campus but also spend time in classrooms supporting students and teachers while emphasizing strong instruction. Research shows that "...highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year; ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount." (Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin, 2013). The four main project workstreams – pipeline, evaluation, career pathways and compensation (including a PBCS), and leadership development, will support DeSoto in building a new human capital management system that demonstrates a district commitment to enhancing quality leadership across campuses (**Absolute Priority 1**). The LEAD DeSoto project is designed to address gaps and weaknesses in the current leadership talent pool, as well as the broken systems and culture that have prevented ingenuity, and ultimately impact student outcomes. As detailed in the logic model in Appendix A, the Lead DeSoto project includes both short-term and long-term outcomes that, based on evidence from research, will result in a more effective leadership workforce that will ultimately lead to better outcomes for DeSoto students. As a proposed subgrantee on the project, TNTP will provide expertise and direction on all aspects of the implementation plan.

Leadership Development: The entire scope of the proposed project begins with the district anchoring itself in a clear vision for instructional leadership. This has yet to be done and there are key questions that district leadership need to answer in developing this vision – What is instructional leadership at DeSoto? How does this impact what the district looks for in screening and hiring leaders? How does this instructional leadership vision impact the district's expectations for a leader's performance on-the-job? It will also be crucial when setting this vision to consider how school leaders use their position to influence building an inclusive school culture. Instructional leadership depends on a principal communicating a focused mission that

emphasizes the importance of educating all students, specifically for students of color, students with disabilities and students whose first language is not English (Leko & Smith, 2010; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005).

TNTP's *Greenhouse Schools: How Schools Can Build Cultures Where Teachers and Students Thrive* (2012) found that teachers value schools where there is a shared and clear vision of excellent instruction, and where school leaders focus their efforts on supporting teachers to do their best work in the classroom. Schools with weak instructional culture are more likely to lose effective teachers, and are less likely to see higher student proficiency rates. When school leaders do more than just manage teachers, but instead create strong instructional cultures, they help teachers reach their full potential in the classroom (TNTP, 2012). TNTP's *Greenhouse Schools* report (2012) details a case study at Memphis College Prep where these instructional leadership practices were successfully implemented and resulted in a class of kindergarteners moving from the 17th percentile at the start of the year to the 83rd percentile at the end of the year on a nationwide math benchmark. These dramatic improvements in achievement were a result of an instructional culture shift in which leaders received consistent feedback and classroom observations from leaders throughout the year.

Principals need to intentionally build and prioritize a learning climate that supports instruction to improve student outcomes (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). In practice for DeSoto, this will require the district to shift leader expectations and put a renewed focus on instructional leaders spending more time in classrooms, giving teachers regular feedback and coaching on their performance, and supporting the ultimate goal of strong instruction for students. As leaders make this shift, they will need to rely on other administrators within the school to handle other duties. Not only will this allow leaders to refocus their efforts on the most

significant need of improving student achievement, but it will also help to address challenges expressed by leaders in juggling both big-picture and day-to-day needs within their campus.

And yet research indicates that while leaders see the largest gains in student achievement when they coach teachers, many principals may not feel comfortable coaching or know how to do it effectively; focusing supports like classroom walkthroughs on professional development rather than observation or evaluation are rare (Grissom & Loeb, 2013). Therefore, a key aspect of LEAD Desoto includes building instructional leadership teams that can collaborate around strategies to improve teaching and learning. Leadership development activities also consist of creating and developing a robust plan and sequence for professional development that provides leaders with access to learning they need to be skilled instructional leaders. Professional development will be focused on strengthening foundational instructional leadership skills, while also giving leaders access to a customized professional learning plan as well as contextual support that accounts for the reality of a leader's daily responsibilities. Lastly, professional development will be delivered through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion with a goal of improving a supportive school culture for educators (**Competitive Preference Priority 1 and 2**). Not only in this focus on equity and inclusion important for supporting a more diverse education workforce, but research indicates that leaders who have a bend toward an equity mindset are more likely to hold high expectations for all students and therefore, potentially reverse the gaps in student outcomes (Nadelson et al., 2020).

Pipeline: Human Resources at DeSoto ISD will collaborate with TNTP to improve practices and strategies to recruit, select, and hire diverse and effective instructional leaders. This process will begin with a thorough review and evaluation of the current hiring practices being implemented that prohibit an effective pipeline, including reviewing the tools and systems (such

as an electronic applicant tracking system to better track applicants, as well as current & predicted vacancies) that DeSoto could be using to improve efficiencies related to hiring. DeSoto's current hiring approach is reactive, not proactive, resulting in crucial time periods leading up to the start of a new school year where rather than orienting and coaching a new leader through the aforementioned instructional leadership PD, DeSoto is rushing to fill vacancies. Because of these hiring delays, DeSoto risks losing substantial numbers of quality candidates and is not giving those hired the appropriate time to prepare fully for the leadership role. Research indicates that when the best candidates have many options for employment, they are most likely to abandon hard-to-staff districts in the face of hiring delays. This forces districts to fill vacancies from an applicant pool with a higher percentage of unqualified applicants (Levin and Quinn, 2003). These findings will inform the pipeline strategies being implemented, including addressing and removing barriers that make earlier hiring a challenge for DeSoto. This will include implementing processes to anticipate vacancies earlier (**Competitive Preference Priority 1**).

A strand of this pipeline work will focus on ensuring that hiring and selection practices are equitable and inclusive, including a reflection on components of their current practices that may unintentionally screen out certain candidates, thus weakening the diversity of DeSoto's workforce. DeSoto's current leader workforce does closely mirror its student body as all sitting principals across the district are Black, and this demographic is the majority within the student body. However, a growing population of Desoto students are Hispanic and thus a central component to the LEAD DeSoto project will be building more inclusive and bias-free HR practices that allow a more ethnically diverse pool of educators to fill leadership positions, including the potential to attract, retain, and develop bilingual school leaders who could assist in

providing needed supports for DeSoto students with limited-English proficiency (**Competitive Preference Priority 2**). Research indicates that schools and districts who incorporate practices such as blind resume reviews, a systematic rating of interview questions, and a diverse interview panel are all effective ways to mitigate implicit biases (Knight, 2017). A review of DeSoto's current hiring processes will include updating systems and structures to incorporate elements such as these that open opportunities for a more diverse candidate pool.

DeSoto ISD will partner with the University of North Texas at Dallas (UNT-Dallas) and with TNTP to develop and implement an aspiring leaders' program that contributes to a sustainable pipeline of diverse instructional leaders with a focus on preparation for the principal seat, and that provides structured career pathways to highly effective educators. Geared toward the incumbent workforce, the aspiring leaders program looks to teachers as a potential pipeline of future leaders. The collaboration with UNT-Dallas is a critical component of this strategy, with the intention of TNTP assisting DeSoto in running an initial cohort of aspiring leaders internally in year one of the project, focusing during that time on program design and cohort recruitment. In year 2 of implementation the objective is to fully launch the program with UNT-Dallas providing program coursework and preparation for principal certification, while TNTP provides job-embedded coaching to participants. The ultimate goal would be to pass along a sustainable model to UNT-Dallas and as noted in the logic model, short term outcomes of this program include 100% of the cohort identifying as people of color, with 20% identifying as Hispanic. This will support the district in its efforts to grow and prepare a more diverse leadership workforce (**Competitive Preference Priority 2**). TNTP has a deep bench of experience partnering with districts on principal training and development. TNTP's Pathway to Leadership in Urban Schools (PLUS) principal certification program prepares educators to lead

improvement and raise student achievement in high-need schools. Initial results from the PLUS program demonstrate tremendous successes – PLUS residents were able to more effectively coach teachers, and students in classrooms coached by PLUS leaders performed better on state and MAP assessments than their peers. Additionally, using the Instructional Culture Insight tool, teachers in PLUS leader-led schools report improving instructional culture. The aspiring leaders program rests on similar design elements and aims to achieve the same results, but is structured around a partnership with UNT-Dallas that helps build a sustainable, community-based leader training program. The program will be inclusive of professional learning experiences that focus on instructional leadership, diversity, and culturally responsive leadership practices **(Competitive Preference Priority 1 & 2)**. Job-embedded coaching sessions will allow participants to receive support that aligns with their experiences on campus. Research indicates that leader development programs that had clear coaching strategies – marrying the technical and adaptive with actual scenario-based instruction – were more effective in preparing leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

Evaluation: DeSoto’s strategic plan clearly states the priority for improving the current school leadership evaluation model: “align all evaluation & compensation systems to achieving student outcomes and our district vision.” Currently, DeSoto uses the T-PESS (Texas Principal Evaluation & Support System) evaluation system – at the foundation of which is a rubric with four growth-oriented components that give principals ongoing, differentiated, targeted, and personalized support and feedback for improvement. It is the most thoroughly vetted evaluation system in the state, and the principal standards developed and utilized in the evaluation are in accordance with Chapter 149 of the state of Texas Administrative Code. TEA offers regional

trainings for principal appraisers to ensure that the process is productive and follows regulations and policies that govern principal evaluations.

While this evaluation process is fair and ensures that principals receive unbiased evaluation and feedback, there is no connection between leadership performance and student outcomes. Thus, the strategy for the LEAD DeSoto project will work towards building an evaluation model in which leadership competencies and student outcomes are aligned, directly impacting and supporting the development and retention of effective leaders who have the best potential for positively impacting student achievement (**Competitive Preference Priority 1**). It is important to note that this new evaluation model will not be implemented in a vacuum, but rather paired with and enhanced by the other activities outlined in this proposal. While leaders will be evaluated on how their performance impacts student outcomes, they will also have access to the necessary supports, coaching, and professional development to support them. Research indicates that principal “accountability policies” (that tie leader performance to student outcomes) can be effective in support students’ learning when paired with aligned curriculum and assessments, equitable and adequate resources for staff, and that ultimately support greater capacity among schools and educators (Papa, 2007). The evaluation model will combine multiple objective and subjective measures, such as teacher feedback compiled through Panorama, to accurately capture the multifaceted role of school leaders. Research indicates that evaluation systems that use multiple measures for evaluating leaders can reduce bias, increase validity and reliability, and ultimately better identify effective school leaders (Viano & Henry, 2016). DeSoto has already begun implementing this model with teachers through the Teacher Incentive Allotment initiative.

Career Pathways & Compensation: DeSoto ISD will collaborate with TNTF to map out and formalize career pathways and opportunities for leadership promotion. Steps in this process will include defining the key competencies and practical experience that leaders need to be successful in each pathway, and defining how this upward mobility impacts earning potential. This process will be informed by the district vision for instructional leadership, determined and refined during the implementation of the leadership development strategies as noted in this proposal. This will help solidify a shared understanding for what effective instructional leadership entails at DeSoto, which helps advance this process of naming necessary leader capabilities. The development of career pathways will target highly effective teachers interested in and capable of broader student level impact through instructional leadership, as well as effective leaders with demonstrable impact on student outcomes. Ultimately these opportunities will support DeSoto in more effectively developing, advancing, and retaining their best talent **(Competitive Preference Priority 1)**. An aligned performance-based compensation system will not only help to attract the best candidates, but will positively impact retention rates amongst the most qualified leaders. Research indicates that performance-based compensation models are associated with a “modest but statistically significant” positive effect on student test scores (Spring, et al., 2016).

All LEAD DeSoto activities are grounded in strong theory, with demonstrated evidence that the outcomes will positively impact DeSoto’s leadership workforce and ultimately student achievement. The strategy of this proposed project aligns squarely with DeSoto’s strategic plan priorities and will help to address many of the core issues that have impeded district progress in recent years.

B.2 Extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.
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The goals, objectives, and associated outcomes outlined in the logic model (see Appendix A for full logic model) illustrate the strategy that will be used by the district to help meet the goal of enhancing the recruitment, selection, development, compensation, professional growth, and retention of leaders through a systematic redesign of the DeSoto ISD Human Capital Management System. Although not required by the TSL grant, TNTP and DeSoto will work together with an external evaluation partner to collect the necessary implementation and impact data and assess the progress of the grant project and determine course corrections. DeSoto ISD has budgeted \$675,000 for an external evaluation partner to extend through all three years of the project. Should DeSoto be awarded the TSL grant, an RFP will be created in partnership with TNTP, who has experience managing external evaluation partnerships on federal grants, and a competitive process will select the external evaluators early in Spring 2022. TNTP has existing external evaluation relationships with researchers at the RAND corporation, Mathematica and Education Analytics and anticipates there would be multiple external evaluation partners who would be eager to support DeSoto in evaluating this project.

There will be monthly meetings with the design and implementation team of the proposed project and the external evaluator supporting the implementation and impact evaluation. TNTP is structured with a separate analytics team that often consults and supports district partners with implementation and evaluation analyses. The analytic staff will ensure the use of formative data to make any midcourse adjustments necessary to achieve project goals and objectives, and will provide the opportunity for program implementers to adjust the evaluation plan as needed.

Throughout the design of the proposed project, DeSoto has identified plans to partner with community-based organizations and institutions, gather feedback from stakeholders, and ensure ongoing monitoring of feedback to ensure the program components are equitable and effective. DeSoto ISD, TNTP and other selected partners in the community will partner with the external evaluators to streamline data collection and ensure systems for ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement. The evaluation model will include a set of repeatable and focused analyses that can point to actionable and testable strategies for district and community-based partners.

DeSoto and TNTP have experience working collaboratively on analytic and data collection heavy projects and will work with the Assessment and Accountability Office to ensure an effective system of data collection will be in place using qualitative and quantitative collection techniques. The prioritization of building the data infrastructure to ensure that DeSoto ISD can access a range of data related to leader performance and the recruitment and retention of diverse leaders will better equip DeSoto ISD and the external evaluators to work together to report out on the range of established metrics, including the USDOE's GPRA metrics.

The table below reflects the goals, key activities, metrics, and measures. This table along with the logic model will drive the design of the evaluation and the reporting timeline. DeSoto anticipates at least bi-annual reporting following key program implementation milestones and timed to allow for course corrections to the next round of implementation. Final implementation and impact reports prepared by the external evaluators would be made available publicly, after DeSoto ISD's review and approval, on the evaluation partner's webpage and published in EBSCOhost for review by the What Works Clearinghouse. Findings may also be shared with the field through DeSoto ISD, TNTP or external evaluation partner communication teams (e.g.,

Twitter, Instagram, blog posts, mail distribution lists) and through conference attendance and submission. Potential conference outlets include, the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE), and convenings of TSL grantees by the US Department of Education. See Appendix A for the logic model that outlines the vision of the work and anticipated pathway to improved student performance over the long-term.

Table 1.5 Goals, Objectives, and Metrics	
Goal 1: Set a clear vision for leadership and development	
Objective 1: Develop a vision and framework for instructional leadership, as well as a development and coaching model to ensure high-need DeISD schools are led by highly-effective leaders and leadership teams	
Metrics Short-term: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 75% of principals have individualized leadership development plans 50% of campuses grow in Feedback and Coaching Panorama survey domain Long-term: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Spring 2024, 90% of principals demonstrate growth in targeted development areas By Spring 2024, 75% of campuses grow in target Panorama survey domains 	Measures - Panorama survey results - Leader development plans
Goal 2: Build and sustain a robust and diverse leadership pipeline	
Objective 2.1: Improve practices and strategies to recruit, select, and hire diverse and effective instructional leaders	
Metrics Short-term: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30% increase in the number of high quality-applicants for vacant instructional leadership positions 	Measures - Vacancy data - Recruitment data - Selection criteria

<p>Long-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Spring 2024, recruitment data indicate an increase in candidates overall that demonstrate leadership competencies in selection 	
Objective 2.2: Develop and implement an aspiring leaders program to create a sustainable pipeline of diverse and effective instructional leaders	
<p>Metrics</p> <p>Short-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 aspiring leaders enrolled in 1st cohort of leadership program 100% of cohort identify as people of color, with 40% identifying as Hispanic <p>Long-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Fall 2024, 25% of instructional leadership vacancies are filled by aspiring leaders participants 	<p>Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enrollment data - Participant demographics - Vacancy data - Hire data
Goal 3: Evaluate leaders in alignment with leadership framework and student-level outcomes	
Objective 3: Improve the school leadership evaluation model to support the vision for effective instructional leadership in DeISD	
<p>Metrics</p> <p>Short-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of principals evaluated according to the new model by Fall 2022 <p>Long-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Summer 2024, leadership evaluation ratings reflect a more positive relationship to student performance indicators when compared to the relationship with current evaluation model By Spring 2024, leadership evaluation ratings are showing greater distribution than the current baseline data (64% developing) 	<p>Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student performance data - Leader evaluation ratings
Goal 4: Create pathways and opportunities for more impact among the most effective leaders	
Objective 4: Develop and implement a system of career pathways and aligned performance-based compensation to support highly effective	

teachers and leaders in their professional growth into instructional leadership roles	
Metrics Short-term: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25% of instructional leadership hires report compensation and career pathway opportunities attracted them to apply and/or stay within the district Long-term: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By Spring 2024, retention rate of high-performing leaders is higher than retention of lower performing leaders 	Measures - New hire/candidate pool satisfaction survey - Leader retention/roster data

C. MANAGEMENT PLAN

C.1 Adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

DeSoto Superintendent [REDACTED] and his cabinet are central players in the success of this proposed project, and have demonstrated their capabilities through the initial progress they have made in implementing a comprehensive strategic plan and vigorous timeline for district turnaround and improvement (see the Resumes for Key Personnel included in Appendix B). [REDACTED] sponsorship and support of this project are critical, as it is high-level vision that will drive the grant as a key contributor to DeSoto's strategic plan. [REDACTED] will also have a direct hand, in partnership with TNTP, in setting the vision for instructional leadership at DeSoto ISD. [REDACTED] came to Desoto in 2018, chosen by the Board of Trustees for his career track record of improving student education. Under [REDACTED] leadership, DeSoto ISD has experienced a 12-point gain in the district's accountability rating according to the Texas Education Agency. Prior to his appointment as the superintendent of DeSoto ISD, [REDACTED] served as a Community Superintendent with Houston-area school system Spring Branch Independent School District where he supported 20 principals. He was a part of a senior

leadership team that transformed the traditional approach to education by creating personalized learning experiences for each of the district's 35,000 students which resulted in dramatic increases in student achievement.

Key personnel in the Superintendent's cabinet who will lead the vision, design, and implementation of project activities include: [REDACTED], Chief of Research, Evaluation and Design (Project Director), [REDACTED] Chief of Human Resources, [REDACTED] Chief Academic Officer, and [REDACTED], Chief Financial Officer. Cabinet members work closely with the Superintendent to oversee day-to-day operations of the district and are closely aligned on the goals and intended outcomes of the project that align with the vision and mission of DeSoto's strategic plan. [REDACTED] is the key sponsor of the LEAD DeSoto project and should the grant be awarded, will support the LEAD DeSoto Project Manager (new position to be created for the purposes of the TSL grant) to oversee the project to ensure fidelity and progress towards stated goals and outcomes. Under [REDACTED] direction, the newly created Research, Evaluation, and Design department has built out a calendar for program evaluations district-wide, judging program impacts against the board-adopted student achievement goals. [REDACTED] and his team have built a continuous improvement model that focuses on identifying systems to evaluate. In the past year, [REDACTED] has helped the district secure over \$1.2 million in state and private grants, demonstrating his knowledge and background in developing results-oriented programs. [REDACTED] will oversee the pipeline and career pathways/PBCS strategies in partnership with TNTTP, and will collaborate with cabinet members on the development of a new leadership evaluation model. [REDACTED] brings prior experience helping school districts set-up and implement new hiring systems geared toward more transparent and effective practices. As the Chief Academic Officer, [REDACTED] will ensure that the career pathways and professional

learning activities are in alignment with the academic-focused aspects of the district's strategic plan. [REDACTED] has over a decade of administrative and leadership experience, and has a demonstrated track record of improving academic achievement in challenging demographic subgroups. [REDACTED] will provide financial leadership on the project through oversight and management of the budget, as well assistance in financial components of the compensation model.

Other key DeSoto staff involved in the project include [REDACTED], Deputy Academic Officer who will drive the leadership vision setting process and will partner with TNTP on launching the aspiring leaders program. [REDACTED] will also collaborate with TNTP and Executive Coaches to develop a sustainable coaching model for campus-based instructional leadership teams, utilizing prior experience coaching teachers with an ultimate positive impact on STAAR scores. [REDACTED], Senior Data Strategist, will monitor and evaluate program metrics and objectives and will collaborate with the external evaluator hired to evaluate the LEAD DeSoto project. As noted above, should DeSoto be awarded the TSL grant the intention is to hire a LEAD DeSoto Project Manager to coordinate activities in collaboration with district staff. The position will be 100% funded through the grant budget for the duration of the project period, but after that time personnel costs will be assumed by DeSoto so the Project Manager can assist with ensuring sustainability for all project components.

As a subgrantee, TNTP, Inc. is supporting the implementation of many of the grant activities. TNTP has an existing, strong relationship with DeSoto ISD that began in 2019; since that time TNTP has supported the district in reaching key milestones including: advising on the strategic planning process, evaluating the effectiveness of teacher evaluation systems, and designing and successfully submitting the approved local designation system developed under

the state's Teacher Incentive Allotment. [REDACTED], TNTP Partner, and [REDACTED], TNTP Director, will oversee the support provided by the organization should the grant be awarded. As a national nonprofit organization focused on improving educational inequality, TNTP has helped more than 200 school systems across the nation realize their goals for students by providing a suite of support services focused on developing talent and ensuring rigorous academics. TNTP's supports will be layered into each aspect of the project: TNTP will work with district leaders to evaluate their current recruitment, selection, and hiring practices and systems and make recommendations accordingly. TNTP will launch and implement the aspiring leaders program including spearheading recruitment and selection, as well as the professional development and coaching of which the program is comprised. TNTP will facilitate the instructional vision setting process with senior leaders to help define the role of instruction leaders, and will collaborate with HR on designing the process for career pathways and performance-based compensation. Lastly, TNTP will consult with senior academic leaders to provide coaching and support of the sitting leadership teams at campuses.

Table 1.6 LEAD DeSoto Project Management Plan and Milestones

Key: **CLT** – cross-functional core leadership team, led by Superintendent [REDACTED]; **PFS** – Purchasing and Financial Services Departments led by Chief [REDACTED] **HR** – Human Resources Department, led by Chief [REDACTED] **PD** – Professional Development Department led by Chief [REDACTED] **RED** – Research, Evaluation, and Design team, including Assessment and Accountability Office led by Chief [REDACTED]; [REDACTED] is a national nonprofit working with DeSoto, and is subgrantee on this application; **DCAO** – Deputy Chief Academic Officer and Principal Manager; **EC** - Executive Coaches; **UNTD** – community partner, University of North Texas at Dallas; **AB** – advisory bodies representative of key stakeholder groups

Milestones	Participants	Date
Year 1		
Grant Management and Program Evaluation		

Post and hire for LEAD DeSoto Project Manager	HR	Fall 2021
Convene core leadership team for project launch	CLT, TNTP	Fall 2021
Identify LEAD DeSoto sustainability team and launch planning	CLT, TNTP	Winter 2021
Launch competitive bid process for external evaluator	PFS, RED	Spring 2022
Develop plan to evaluate effectiveness of activities and establish monthly meeting cadence	CLT, RED	Spring 2022
Leadership Development		
Develop instructional leadership vision and framework	CLT, HR, PD, TNTP, DCAO, AB	Fall 2021
Refine coaching and development approach in alignment with framework	PD, TNTP, DCAO	Fall 2021
Develop leadership development plan template	PD, TNTP, DCAO	Winter 2021
Begin job-embedded coaching of campus-based instructional leadership teams	TNTP	Winter 2021
Develop executive coach profile and begin recruitment	HR, TNTP, DCAO	Winter 2021
Finalize executive coach hiring and begin onboarding	HR, TNTP, DCAO	Spring 2022
Pipeline		
Audit current recruitment, selection, hiring, and retention district practices and systems	HR, TNTP	Fall 2021
Develop program model for aspiring leaders	RED, TNTP, DCAO, UNTD	Fall/Winter 2021
Develop recruitment strategies and selection model for aspiring leaders program	HR, TNTP	Winter 2021
Improve district selection model in alignment with instructional leadership vision	HR, TNTP, DCAO	Winter 2021
Implement improved recruitment, selection, hiring,	HR, TNTP	Spring 2022

and retention district practices and systems		
Begin recruitment for aspiring leaders program	HR, TNTP	Spring 2022
Evaluation		
Assess opportunities and challenges with leadership evaluation practices	HR, TNTP, AB	Fall 2021
Update evaluation model in alignment with leadership framework and student outcomes	CLT, HR, RED, TNTP, DCAO	Fall 2021
Train and norm appraisers on updated evaluation model	HR, DCAO	Winter 2021
Update data systems to support data collection for updated evaluation model	RED	Winter 2021
Pilot evaluation model	HR, DCAO	Spring 2022
Finalize evaluation model based on pilot and prepare for full year implementation	HR, RED, TNTP, DCAO	Summer 2022
Onboard, train, and norm any new appraisers, instructional leaders, or other relevant stakeholders	HR, DCAO	Summer 2022
Career Pathways & Compensation		
Audit and map existing career pathways and development opportunities for instructional leaders	PD, TNTP, AB	Fall 2021
Develop updated career pathways map in alignment with leadership vision and framework	PD, TNTP, DCAO, AB	Winter 2021
Update compensation systems to align to career pathways	PFS, RED, TNTP	
Develop targeted development opportunities in alignment with pathways	PD	Spring 2022
Year 2		
Grant Management and Program Evaluation		

Convene core leadership team for yearly evaluation and reflection	CLT, RED TNTP	Fall 2022
Finalize LEAD DeSoto sustainability plan	CLT	Spring 2023
Leadership Development		
Facilitate collective learning series to sustain leadership framework and coaching	PD, TNTP, DCAO	Ongoing
Provide job-embedded coaching of campus-based instructional leadership teams	TNTP, EC	Ongoing
Provide targeted monthly professional development	PD, TNTP, EC	Ongoing
Pipeline		
Continue implementation of improved recruitment, selection, hiring, and retention district practices and systems and capacity building of district staff	HR, TNTP	Ongoing
Enroll first cohort for aspiring leaders program	UNTD	Fall 2022
Begin recruitment for second aspiring leaders cohort	HR, TNTP	Spring 2023
Evaluation		
Onboard, train, and norm any new appraisers, instructional leaders, or other relevant stakeholders	HR, DCAO	Summer 2023
Review of the effectiveness of evaluation model, monitoring implementation and relationship to student learning	RED, TNTP	Summer 2023
Provide professional development, calibration, and norming of appraisers	HR, DCAO	Ongoing
Career Pathways & Compensation		
Progress monitor effectiveness of pathways and compensation in attracting	HR, PD, RED, TNTP, DCAO	Ongoing

and developing effective instructional leaders		
Provide targeted development opportunities in alignment with pathways to strengthen and sustain instructional leadership pipeline	PD	Ongoing
Year 3		
Grant Management and Program Evaluation		
Convene core leadership team for yearly evaluation and reflection	CLT, RED TNTP	Fall 2023
Leadership Development		
Convene stakeholders to finalize sustainability plan	CLT, DCAO	Fall 2023
Provide job-embedded coaching of campus-based instructional leadership teams	TNTP, EC	Ongoing
Provide targeted monthly professional development	PD, TNTP, EC	Ongoing
Pipeline		
Continue implementation of improved recruitment, selection, hiring, and retention district practices and systems and capacity building of district staff	HR, TNTP	Ongoing
Enroll second cohort for aspiring leaders program	UNTD	Fall 2023
Begin recruitment for second aspiring leaders cohort	HR, TNTP	Spring 2024
Evaluation		
Onboard, train, and norm any new appraisers, instructional leaders, or other relevant stakeholders	HR, DCAO	Summer 2024
Review of the effectiveness of evaluation model, monitoring implementation and relationship to student learning	RED, TNTP	Summer 2024

Provide professional development, calibration, and norming of appraisers	HR, DCAO	Ongoing
Career Pathways & Compensation		
Progress monitor effectiveness of pathways and compensation in attracting and developing effective instructional leaders	HR, PD, RED, TNTP, DCAO	Ongoing
Provide targeted development opportunities in alignment with pathways to strengthen and sustain instructional leadership pipeline	PD	Ongoing

D. ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES

D.1 Likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement.

The most significant system change that will occur as a result of the project is the development and implementation of a HCMS and accompanying PBCS for instructional leaders that does not currently exist. As a district, DeSoto does not currently put any formal emphasis through its evaluation systems on the role of leaders as instructional coaches, nor does the district have a collective vision for leaders at all levels who prioritize in-classroom supports and coaching for educators. Thus, the emphasis placed on building a vision and framework for instructional leadership will improve school culture district-wide and yield systemic change in how the role of leaders is viewed in relation to student achievement. The implementation of career pathways and a performance-based compensation model will improve retention and improve the district's ability to competitively attract talented candidates. Professional learning and development will usher in a systemic change by emphasizing and ensuring continuous improvement amongst leaders, and will improve leaders' ability through hands-on coaching and personalized supports. Because much of this proposed project builds upon existing investments being made through DeSoto's implementation of a PBCS for teachers, conditions for system

change are well-established. As already noted, DeSoto ISD has a commitment to evaluation and continuous improvement, evident in recent district restructuring, which will contribute to meaningful system change that allows for feedback and modifications as needed.

D.2 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.

The pipeline strategies outlined in this proposal will focus on building capacity by ensuring that each DeSoto campus has the leadership workforce needed to support the goals and aspirations of DeSoto ISD students. Through the implementation of an aspiring leaders program in collaboration with UNT-Dallas, the project will build local capacity by expanding a pipeline of qualified leaders ready to fill vacant positions immediately, and by offering expanded services to highly-skilled teachers interested in embarking on a career path. Through skill-building, professional development, and the implementation of ongoing supports and coaching that provides individualized support to each leader, the project increases the capacity of its workforce. These expanded services will have a cascading effect – as leaders become more confident in their role, they will have increased ability to support and improve teacher performance and ultimately student achievement. This project sits on the shoulders of significant community support and involvement between DeSoto and its partners, and is part of a larger comprehensive effort to build local capacity between these partners to best serve the needs of students and families in the community.

D.3 Extent to which the applicant demonstrates that it has the resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant, including a multi-year financial and operating model and accompanying plan; the demonstrated commitment of any partners; evidence of broad support from stakeholders critical to the project's long-term success.

Beginning in 2019 when the district was working through financial exigency strategies, DeSoto ISD took out a \$15 million loan to stay solvent. Thus, in the last three years the district has made a \$5 million loan payment out of regular budgeted operating funds. This means that

DeSoto is not just adopting a balanced budget, but is operating on 93% of its operating budget with the remainder going to make loan payments. After 2022, that funding comes back to the district and will be refocused on strategic plan initiatives – this will allow DeSoto to earmark future operating funds to support the continuation and sustainability of the LEAD DeSoto project. Implementation of a HCMS for instructional leaders has been a crucial part of the district's long-term strategy with the goal of implementation starting in the 2023-2024 school year. Should the TSL grant be awarded to DeSoto, the funding will allow the district to get a two-year head start on a project slated for a future school year with fewer budget constraints.

As noted in the budget narrative, the match strategy for this proposal centers around in-kind staffing costs from the DeSoto district leadership involved in project implementation. Because these staffing costs will not be assumed by the grant, but rather are built into the district's local operating budget, there is a clear indication that the district will have the personnel capacity to continue and sustain this work beyond the grant period. The long-term success of this project will be bolstered by the support of community partners evidenced throughout this narrative (see Appendix C for letters of support). The partners involved in the TEA Community Partnerships grant along with DeSoto are deepening a relationship that will continue beyond the scope of this grant as they collaborate on forming a 501(c) 3 and become entrenched in key project components like the aspiring leaders program. Support from the state and the Board of Trustees is evidenced in the conservator-directed corrective action plans that require the district to implement new HR and talent development practices, as well as the Board mandate that evaluations must be tied to student outcomes. If awarded, the TSL grant will be another accelerant in an auspicious and long-term improvement strategy well underway.

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