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(A) Evidence of Support

Union County Public Schools (UCPS) is the sixth-largest school district in North Carolina, with over 42,000 students attending our 53 schools, which include 30 elementary (K-5), 9 middle (6-8) and 11 high (9-12) schools plus 3 special services schools. Our Teacher and School Leader Incentive program, *EPIC* (*Educator Performance Incentives and Career Pathways*), will target 13 of our lowest-performing, highest-poverty schools. Our project was developed in collaboration with teachers, school leaders, and district administrators and meets **Absolute Priorities 1) Human Capital Management System (HCMS) and 4) Evaluation and Support Systems for Teachers and School Leaders**. *EPIC* has two over-arching goals: 1) Redesign our district's existing HCMS and Performance-Based Compensation System (PBCS) to better attract, place, retain, and sustain effective educators; and 2) Develop and increase teacher and school leader effectiveness to more positively impact student academic achievement. Districts taking a similar approach to *EPIC*, which includes evidence-based, job-embedded professional development, monetary and non-monetary compensation including career ladders, and aligned supports, have resulted in improved recruiting efforts, student achievement, and high-performing teacher and school leader retention.¹

1) ***Comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning.*** ► **UCPS HCMS:** Currently, UCPS uses results from educator evaluations to assess teacher and school leader performance and to inform a variety of human capital decisions including the placement, retention, dismissal, compensation, and promotion of personnel. Our HCMS online portal provides access to a variety of databases including details on student achievement, summative assessment results, and results from the NC Educator Evaluation System (NCEES) which includes student growth calculated using Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS). Accessible to teachers and administrators, the data portal provides information at the teacher, course, school, and district

levels to better inform data-based decision-making. For example, data aggregation allows school and district administrators to pinpoint specific elements of each educator evaluation standard, indicating where educators may be experiencing common difficulties and allows for scheduling of professional development (PD) to improve educators' skill set and effectiveness. Teacher and school leader evaluation results are aggregated and provided to our state's colleges and universities to assist them in developing the content and requirements for their teacher and school administrator training programs.² Information from our HCMS has been used to inform pilots of our existing PBCS which currently provides financial incentives for 1) third-grade reading teachers in the top 25% of our district as measured by student academic growth; 2) Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) teachers for each student who passes AP and IB exams; 3) Career and Technical Education teachers who provide instruction in a course that leads to the attainment of an industry certification or credential; and 4) for recruitment and tenure bonuses to educators who agree to work in our district's hard-to-staff, highest-need schools. Other existing structures in UCPS designed to support student academic achievement and improve teaching and learning in meeting the **TSL Absolute Priorities** and **Requirement 1** include: ► **Alignment with College-and-Career Ready Standards:** In 2005, NC's State Board of Education, adopted the *Framework for 21st Century Learning (P21)*, a national initiative developed with input from teachers, educators, experts, and business leaders, to define the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in work and in life as 21st Century citizens.³ In 2010, NC began implementation of a Future-Ready Core Course of Study, a set of rigorous academic content standards designed to encourage students to master the skills and knowledge needed to be college-and-career ready. These standards incorporate both the Common Core Standards in Math and English Language Arts developed by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers

and content standards developed by the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) for all other subject areas, in alignment with the Common Core. These standards delineate what a student should know and be able to do at the end of a grade or course and were developed using national standards, current research, and exemplary practices.⁴ Corresponding statewide assessments were also extensively revised or developed to provide an aligned, balanced assessment system using benchmark and summative data on student mastery of content standards plus data from formative assessments gathered during the classroom instructional process to inform teaching and learning and provide differentiation. ► **Instructional Model:** UCPS districtwide instructional model is Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR), based on the Vygotsky higher learning model.⁵ GRR strategies include goal setting, modeling, guided instruction, feedback, and collaborative learning, leading to independent mastery, which has been shown to be particularly effective for English Language Learners.^{6,7} ► **Statewide Accountability Model based on Student Growth:** NC was one of the first states to establish a statewide school accountability program, the ABCs of Public Education, launched in 1995 to provide stakeholders with information about school performance on a variety of indicators. The ABCs were revised most recently in 2012-13, when rebranded as the READY initiative, it included a student growth measurement using EVAAS in addition to NC's common, statewide standardized assessments. EVAAS determines the academic growth of students in each school and district and is used to assess adequate yearly progress. In 2013, NCDPI developed a 5-point scale (*Table 1*) for end-of-grade and end-of-course assessments which are used to assess a student's achievement in meeting state standards:⁸ This information is reported on annual report cards at the school and district level that include details on the percent of students who meet the college-and-career readiness standard and who meet grade-level proficiency.⁹ Overall performance letter grades are then assigned to each school and district with 80% of the

score based on student achievement scores and 20% on student academic growth.

Table 1. Scale to Assess Student Achievement on EOG and EOC			
Level	Knowledge and Skills	On-Grade Level Proficiency	College-and-Career Readiness
5	Superior Command	Meets	Meets
4	Solid Command	Meets	Meets
3	Sufficient Command	Meets	Does Not Meet
2	Partial Command	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet
1	Limited Command	Does Not Meet	Does Not Meet

► **Evaluation Standards:** Our state worked to align the NC Educator Evaluation Standards (NCEES) with the P21/READY Framework to emphasize the importance of leadership, teamwork, authentic assessment, and technology-infused learning while assessing performance in relation to the NC Professional Standards for educators. These standards ensure that evaluation methods are clear and fairly measure performance in relation to state standards and promote instructional leadership, quality teaching, and professional decision-making to positively impact students.^{10,11}

Table 2. NCEES Standards for Teachers and School Leaders	
Teachers	1) Demonstration of leadership; 2) Establishment of a respectful environment for a diverse population of students; 3) Knowledge of content taught; 4) Facilitation of learning; 5) Reflection on practice; and 6) Student growth. ¹²
School Leaders	1) Strategic leadership; 2) Instructional leadership; 3) Cultural leadership; 4) HR leadership; 5) Managerial leadership; 6) External development leadership; 7) Micro-Political leadership; and 8) Academic achievement measured by student growth. ¹³

NCDPI provides training and resources to teachers and school leaders on NCEES through conferences, professional development sessions, online webinars, and a wikispace containing

videos, reference materials and professional development modules on each standard. NCDPI has also provided observation calibration training designed to improve inter-rater reliability to ensure consistency in evaluation observation protocols. ► **Evaluation Process:** The teacher evaluation process includes:¹⁴ 1) training in the process; 2) orientation to the rubric; 3) ongoing self-assessment during the year; 4) pre-observation conference with a principal review of self-assessment, professional growth plan, and written description of lessons to be observed; 5) at least three observations by principal and peers; 6) post-observation conference documenting strengths and weaknesses via a rubric; 7) summary evaluation conference and scoring the teacher summary rating; and 8) development of a personalized professional development plan.¹⁵ The principal/assistant principal process includes:¹⁶ 1) orientation to the process; 2) pre-evaluation planning with self-assessment and performance goals; 3) initial meeting to discuss self-assessment, goal development, and evidence; 4) data collection to support goals; 5) mid-year conference to discuss progress and review student growth; 6) preparation of a consolidated performance assessment; and 7) summary of evaluation conference.¹⁷ Teachers and school leaders are required to complete an end-of-year rating form and develop a professional development plan for the next year.¹⁸ *Table 3* shows the 5-point scale used to assess achievement on Standards 1-5 (teachers) and 1-7 (leaders).

Table 3. Five-Point Scoring to Assess Achievement on NCEES

Level	Rating	Description
1	Not Demonstrated	Did not demonstrate competence or adequate growth
2	Developing	Demonstrated adequate growth, but did not demonstrate competence
3	Proficient	Basic competence on standard(s) of performance was demonstrated
4	Accomplished	Exceeded basic competence on standard(s) most of the time
5	Distinguished	Consistently and significantly exceeded basic competence

Student growth for Standard 6 (teachers) and Standard 8 (leaders) are developed using EVAAS to determine if students met state academic performance standards and exhibited expected growth compared to an annual statewide growth model. Core Teachers who teach the tested subjects of Grade 3-8 Math, Reading, and Science, and secondary Math I, English II, and Biology receive growth calculated at the classroom level. Non-Core Teachers and School Leaders receive growth ratings at the schoolwide level. Once an educator has a three-year rolling average of student growth values, a 3-point scale is used to assess their impact on student academic growth which includes: 1) *Does not meet expected growth*; 2) *Meets expected growth*; and 3) *Exceeds expected growth*.¹⁹ Results inform the UCPS HCMS: teachers and school leaders who score below proficiency on any standard can be recommended for dismissal, demotion, or nonrenewal. Beginning Teachers who are not Proficient on NCEES 1-5, are not awarded a Continuation License and are not eligible to remain employed as a teacher. If UCPS retains an educator on continuation status who scores below proficiency, they are placed on a PD growth plan and receive targeted supports to help them reach proficiency within one year. ► **Effectiveness Ratings:** Scoring derived from the standards and EVAAS are used to calculate an educator effectiveness rating as seen in *Table 4*.

Table 4. Effectiveness Ratings for Teachers and School Leaders

Level	Rating	Description
1	In Need of Improvement	Failure to receive Proficient or higher on Standards 1-5 (1-7 leaders) and “did not meet expected growth” on Standard 6 (teachers) or 8 (leaders)
2	Effective	Proficient or higher on Standards 1-5 (1-7 leaders) and “meets expected growth” or higher on Standard 6 (teachers) or 8 (leaders)
3	Highly Effective	Accomplished or higher on Standards 1-5 (1-7 leaders) and “exceeds expected growth” on Standard 6 (teachers) or 8 (leaders)

2) *Services to be provided involve appropriate partners for maximizing effectiveness of services.*

► **Educator Support:** We administered surveys to teachers and administrators about our district's possible pursuit of TSL funding, and specifically targeted educators in our 13 highest-need schools to gather their honest, unfiltered opinions via an anonymous survey. Survey response was 62% of educators in these schools and their input was critical in informing key *EPIC* components. The majority, 84%, expressed their support for pursuing TSL funding (with an additional 15% remaining neutral). Even more (87%) supported a revised compensation system designed to improve student achievement and promote educator effectiveness. Complete survey results can be found in *Appendix F*. ► **Administrator Support:** We conducted focus groups with principals in our target schools to gather their thoughts and input into program design. Each principal also signed a memorandum of understanding (*Appendix E*), which details their approval of *EPIC* components and support for program implementation in their respective schools. ► **Facilitator Support:** We currently employ 9 Instructional Content Facilitators and 11 Instructional Technology Facilitators in our 13 target schools who provide coaching, modeling, and professional development for teachers. *EPIC* will use their expertise to provide job-embedded professional development and coaching designed to increase educator effectiveness and student achievement. Our Facilitators have also signed a detailed MOU to demonstrate their commitment to *EPIC*, as seen in *Appendix E*. ► **Community Support:** Other key partners include the Union County Educational Foundation, a local non-profit benefitting our district, which has pledged to provide resources for our grant including funding to teachers to purchase technology and curriculum enhancements for their classrooms. Union County has also pledged to provide funding for School Resource Officers in target schools to help improve school climate. ► **Institute of Higher Education:** The University of North Carolina-Charlotte has also signed on to assist our program

by providing access to support services including continuing education (Master's program) and professional development for target staff. ► **NC Department of Public Instruction:** NCDPI will provide customized support to enhance curriculum and instruction, accountability, teacher and administrator preparation and licensing, and professional development. NCDPI's resources will assist our efforts in: 1) implementing personalized professional development; 2) providing resources for educator growth and improvement; 3) supporting Beginning Teachers and school leaders to meet teaching standards; 4) identifying professional development modules and webinars to meet the needs of educators to increase their effectiveness levels; 5) accessing the NCEES to measure educator performance against established standards; 6) accessing EVAAS data to plot student growth; and 7) using the resources of the effectiveness division to access leadership and technical assistance. *Appendix E* contains letters of commitment from our partners.

3) ***Project builds on related efforts to improve relevant outcomes using existing funding.***

► **Federal:** NCDPI was awarded a federal Department of Education Race to the Top grant in 2012 and used this funding to provide resources to assist districts, schools, and teachers with implementation of our state's new content standards and to develop aligned, standardized assessments to provide students with better opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. They piloted work on EVAAS, funding availability of this data to districts throughout NC on student growth at the individual student, class, and whole-school levels, which are used to inform our state's accountability system and used in our educator evaluation system. Additional federal funds are supplied to our district via Title I and Title II, which pay for professional development and specialized support staff in our Title I target schools. *EPIC* will leverage this funding to supplement *EPIC's* job-embedded professional development component which includes intensive professional development, coaching, and modeling provided by our Facilitators,

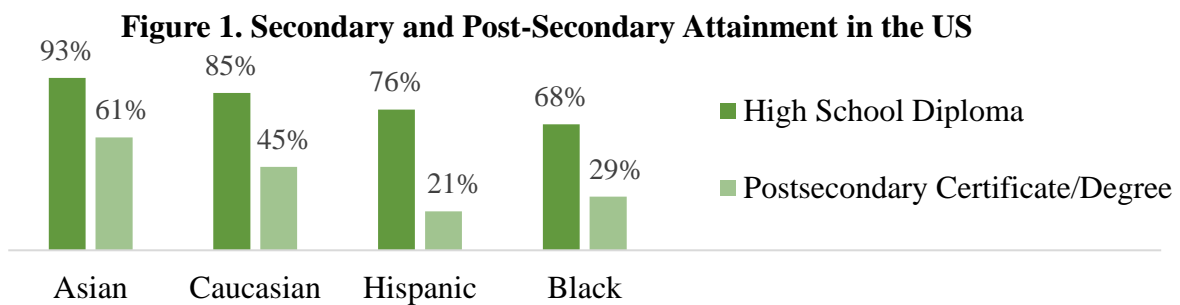
Teacher Leaders, and Mentors. ► **State:** NCDPI provides customized support to enhance curriculum and instruction, accountability measures, and teacher and administrator preparation and licensing. The Division of Educator Effectiveness hosts an online PD portal featuring self-paced and instructor-led courses aligned with state educator evaluation standards. They also host initial mentor training which will be used in part to train our *EPIC* mentors. NCDPI also works with the University of North Carolina system to fund and provide *New Teacher Support Institutes* across our state. In our area, these Institutes are sponsored quarterly in conjunction with UNC-Charlotte and comprise part of our *EPIC* program approach as we ensure that our Beginning Teachers use these opportunities to receive training on key instructional components of the NCEES such as creating a supportive, respectful classroom environment for all students, facilitating the learning process, and contributing to the academic success of students. ► **UCPS:** Each of our target schools have Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), either by grade level or subject area, which meet weekly to review data related to instructional decision-making and take part in professional development centered on improving their professional skill sets in alignment with NCEES and NC Content Standards. PLCs will provide the existing structures to deliver more coherent and coordinated professional development, which will include modeling, coaching, feedback, and reflection, and the use of student-level data and related materials to create a shared understanding of effective instruction and how it can positively impact student academic achievement. Training within our PLCs will be provided by our 9 locally funded Instructional Content Facilitators (ICF), who will use a variety of methods including coaching, modeling, and targeted feedback to support improvements at the school and teacher levels. They will specifically target skills, content, and knowledge aligning with the NC Educator Effectiveness Standards to increase teacher quality and positively impact student achievement. We will also use the services of our locally-funded

Instructional Technology Facilitators (ITF), which currently include one per elementary school and two shared between our target middle and high schools, who will assist *EPIC* schools in providing coaching and professional development to incorporate technology into their instructional practice. Our School Leadership Teams, consisting of the principal, AP, ICF, ITF, and Lead Teachers and our District Leadership Team, which includes the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, and Directors of HR, Technology, Elementary and Secondary Education, and Student Services, will align professional development, coaching, and mentoring to further support our teachers and leaders. This will include experts in the field on subjects such as supporting under-resourced learners and improving the classroom learning environment for students and the school working environment for staff.

(B) Need for Project

1) ***Proposed project will provide services or otherwise address needs of at-risk students.*** Union County is part of the Charlotte Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) which over the past decade has been the fourth fastest growing MSA in the US.²⁰ Our county population has spiked from 123,677 in 2000 to nearly 223,000 in 2016, representing an 80% increase.²¹ This rapid growth was reflected in UCPS where from 1997 to 2017, our district experienced a staggering 98% increase in our student population, making UCPS the sixth-largest school district in NC.²² The Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina predicts that by 2035, our district will gain an additional 14,000 students.²³ This rapid growth has resulted in overcrowded schools, prompting a major building campaign. It has also resulted in a dramatic demographic shift--nearly 13% of our county's population--1 in 8 households—do not speak English as a home language.²⁴ The changing face of the increased diversity of students in UCPS has run parallel to that of the US as a whole: since 1968, American schools have seen a 28% decline in enrollment of Caucasian

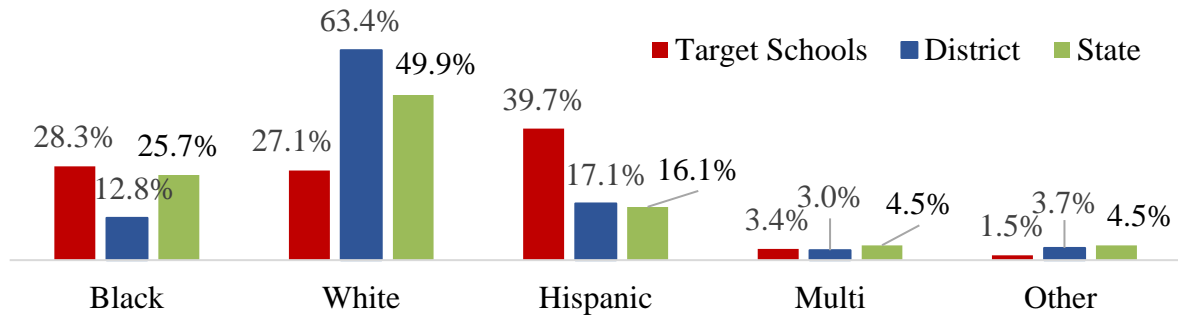
students, 19% increase in African-American students, and an astounding 495% increase in Hispanic students.²⁵ By 2043, the majority of US residents will be a minority member, creating a minority-as-majority population.²⁶ Historically, minority students have lagged behind their Caucasian and Asian counterparts on a number of academic indicators. Subgroup academic gaps begin as early as kindergarten and typically persist throughout a student’s academic trajectory, negatively impacting their long-term educational attainment, at the secondary and post-secondary levels, as seen in *Figure 1*.^{27,28} Finding ways to increase educational achievement and attainment for minority students is critically important to our nation’s long-term economic security in which 60% of all job openings by 2025 will require some type of post-secondary degree/certification.^{29,30}



► **Poverty and TSL Eligibility:** *EPIC* will target 6 Title I schools identified by the NC Department of Public Instruction as among the lowest-performing schools in our state (Benton Heights, East, and Walter Bickett Elementary; East Union and Monroe Middle; and Monroe High) plus an additional 7 Title I schools that are also at high-risk (Marshville, Rock Rest, Rocky River, Sardis, Union, and Wingate Elementary and Forest Hills High). The average free and reduced lunch rates in our elementary (83%), middle (83%) and high (75%) schools far exceed the district average of 36%. Complete eligibility documentation is provided in *Appendix B* (**Requirement 3**).

► **Racial Inequities:** Poverty and student racial composition disparities have been confirmed to be the strongest correlates of academic achievement gaps and educational attainment.^{31,32} *Figure 2* illustrates minority enrollment of our target schools compared to district and state averages.³³

Figure 2. EPIC Student Demographic Comparison



Just over 15% of teachers and administrators in our target schools are minority members. Non-minority teachers and school administrators often lack concrete professional development on understanding racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse students’ unique learning needs which hinders them in providing appropriate instruction or interventions.³⁴ This can negatively impact racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse students’ academic achievement and eventual attainment.³⁵ Increasing racial diversity in the school workforce however, has been shown to help close achievement gaps and improve the school experience for all students, not just minorities.^{36,37}

► **College-and Career-Readiness:** Students scoring at performance levels 4 and 5 on EOG and EOC exams are considered to have a solid command of knowledge and skills and meet state standards for college-and-career readiness. Our target schools, as seen in *Table 5*, perform far below district and state averages, indicating they are off-course for future career success.³⁸

Table 5. Percentage of Students On-Track for College-and-Career Readiness						
	Reading	Math	Science	English II	Math I	Biology
UCPS Average	57.2%	64.4%	70.9%	65.3%	66.1%	60.1%
State Average	45.8%	47.0%	63.1%	49.6%	49.9%	47.3%

► **Academic Achievement:** Low-income and minority students tend to have poorer academic outcomes than their more affluent counterparts, including lower grades and scores on standardized tests, high school completion, and college enrollment and completion rates.³⁹ *Table 6* shows results from standardized testing in end-of-grade exams in Reading, Math, and Science for our elementary and middle school students and end-of-course exams for high school students in English II, Biology, and Math I (considered gateway courses for college). Comparisons between our target schools, UCPS, and state averages indicate that students in our target schools lack sufficient command of knowledge and skills and are failing to reach proficiency.⁴⁰

Table 6. EPIC Students Below Proficiency Levels

	Reading or English II	Math or Math I	Science or Biology
Target Elementary	54.4%	42.6%	40.4%
UCPS Average	32.0%	29.1%	21.0%
NC Average	43.1%	45.3%	27.3%
Target Middle	61.9%	60.1%	54.5%
UCPS Average	32.0%	29.1%	21.0%
NC Average	43.1%	45.3%	27.3%
Target High	56.3%	63.3%	59.1%
UCPS Average	25.9%	25.4%	32.7%
NC Average	41.2%	39.5%	44.4%

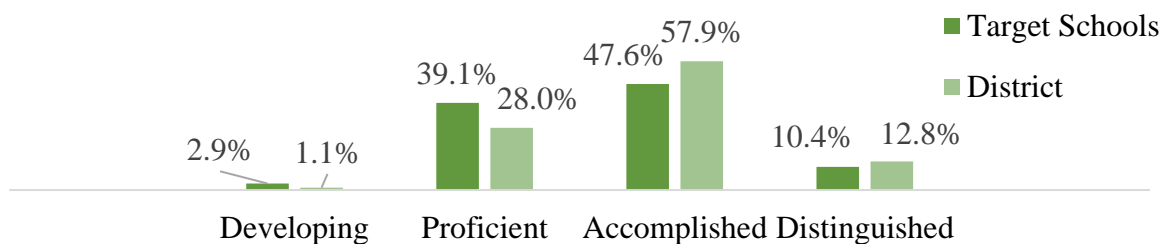
► **School Climate:** English Language Learners, minority, and low-income students are far more likely to experience academic and behavioral problems including suspension, expulsion, or dropping out of school.⁴¹ Thus far in 2016-17, average daily attendance (ADA) in *EPIC* middle schools averages 94.9%, lagging behind the UCPS average of 96.5% as does ADA in our *EPIC*

high schools (93.4%) versus the district (95.3%). Criminal acts reported per 100 students in our elementary (.38) and middle (2.68) schools also outpace both district (.25 and .93) and state (.21 and .83) averages, respectively. Short and long term suspensions are also high as seen below.

Table 7. Short and Long-Term Suspensions per 100 Students (2015-16)									
	Elementary			Middle			High		
	EPIC	UCPS	NC	EPIC	UCPS	NC	EPIC	UCPS	NC
Short-Term	10.1	4.78	13.15	73.8	22.93	14.64	35.3	13.23	14.02
Long-Term	0	0	0.06	69.5	0.17	0.06	4.5	0.02	0.07

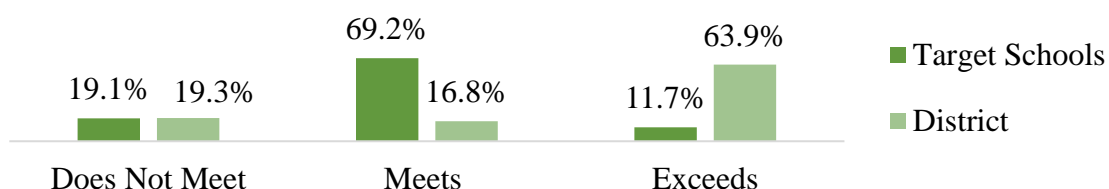
► **Educator Quality:** Teachers are the single most important variable in improving student achievement.⁴² Inequities in access to effective teachers exist in our target schools, as seen in *Figure 3 (Competitive Priority 1)*. In 2015-16, students in *EPIC* schools were *more* likely to be taught by a teacher rated “Developing” or “Proficient” and far *less* likely to be taught by a teacher rated as “Accomplished” or “Distinguished” than students in non-*EPIC* schools.⁴³

Figure 3. Averages for NCEES Teacher Standards 1-5



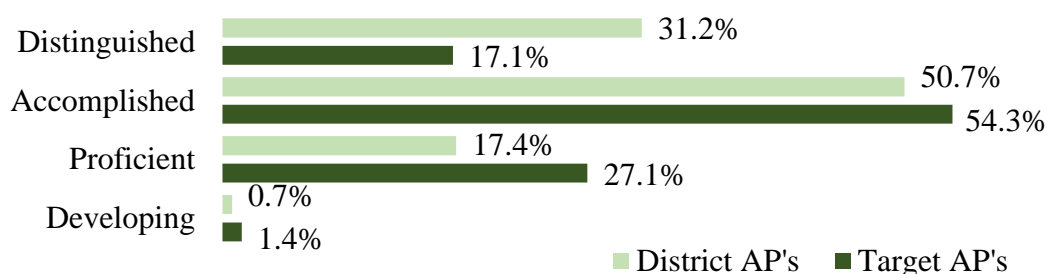
► **Student Growth:** Target school teachers were also far *less* likely to have a significant impact on growth based on EVAAS data from the 2015-16 school year as illustrated in *Figure 4*.⁴⁴

Figure 4. NCEES Teacher Standard 6: Student Growth



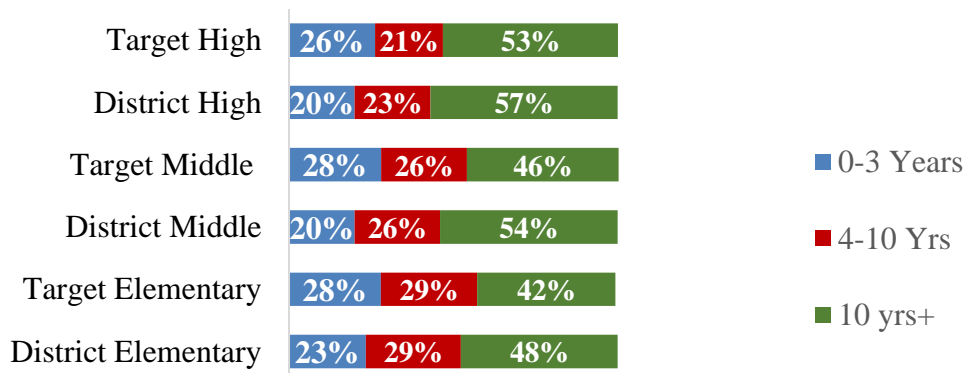
► **School Leader Effectiveness:** Improving school leadership is a critical component of improving student achievement, second only to teacher quality and effectiveness.⁴⁵ NCEES results revealed that 43% of our principals were helming schools that failed to meet their growth targets.⁴⁶ And while our target principals scored well on the NCEES as a whole (96% Accomplished or Distinguished); our assistant principals did not fare as well, and were far more likely to score on the lower end of the evaluation scale than at the higher end, as seen in *Figure 5*, below.⁴⁷

Figure 5. Average Score on School Leader Evaluation Standards 1-7



► **Educator Experience:** More principals and assistant principals' in our target schools (42%) had three years or less experience with only 14% having 10 or more years' experience.⁴⁸ Our target school teachers are also far *more* likely to be beginning teachers, and far *less* likely to be highly experienced (more than 10 years), than other teachers in our district, as seen in *Figure 6*, below.⁴⁹

Figure 6. Three-Year Average of Teaching Experience



► **Teacher Shortages:** In the past five years, districts in NC have faced increased difficulties in teacher recruitment due to a 30% decline in enrollment in teacher preparation programs in our

state.⁵⁰ In part, this is due to college students pursuing more financially lucrative fields for their majors as NC teachers' wages are 65% of that of other college graduates, lower than the national teacher-to-other profession wage rate average of 77%.⁵¹ In 2003-04, the average teacher salary in NC was 22nd highest in the US, but by 2015-16 had fallen to 41st lowest due to underfunding and budget cuts by the State which funds the majority portion of teacher salaries in NC.⁵²

► **Retention:** Teacher turnover rates have more than doubled between 2010-11 and 2015-16, further reducing the supply of available teachers.⁵³ The most often-cited reason for leaving was low pay followed by poor working conditions. Other reasons given include early retirement, going to teach in a private or charter school, changing careers, or moving to another state. Union County borders the SC state line and our district has faced growing attrition rates due to higher salaries offered in SC. High teacher attrition negatively impacts academic achievement, particularly in low-performing schools and those with high-minority student populations, such as those *EPIC* will target.⁵⁴ Teacher turnover rates in *EPIC* schools from the past three years outpace UCPS at the elementary (16.7% vs. 14.6%), middle (20.7% vs. 15%) and high (19.3% vs. 14.7%) schools.

► **Teacher Attendance:** One clear sign of employee dissatisfaction is the number of annual leave days taken by educators. Teachers in our target schools have a 7.9% absentee rate compared to our district's average overall of 5.7%.⁵⁵ Such absences negatively impact student achievement and the overall school climate.⁵⁶ Initiatives to increase educator accountability that provide compensation for decreased absenteeism have been shown to be effective in improving teacher attendance.^{57,58}

2) *Specific gaps or weaknesses have been identified and will be addressed.* ► **Needs Assessment:**

We began our needs assessment by seeking educator input into perceived gaps in services and suggested improvements to inform *EPIC*'s project design. Initially, we convened the District Leadership Team including the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Directors of

Elementary and Secondary Education, Professional Development, Accountability and Student Services, AIG, and Federal Programs, to study data across all 53 schools in our district. These administrators identified specific schools to target for TSL services based on key data indicators including poverty level, student achievement, discipline, student and teacher attendance, teacher effectiveness, retention, and working condition surveys. Once high-need schools were identified, in early 2017, we surveyed teachers and school leaders in these 13 schools to gain their input into gaps and weaknesses. Over 62% of educators in these schools completed surveys and due to the anonymity of the survey design, responded with thoughtful input regarding what they saw as the greatest needs and weaknesses in their schools and at the district level. Educators suggested several program components they felt would be beneficial, which we have integrated into *EPIC's* project design. The need cited most often was job-embedded professional development at 85% with leading topic areas including: how to work more effectively with diverse learners, providing differentiated instruction, improving the classroom learning environment, and more content-specific PD. Teachers and principals also indicated that they needed a greater understanding of NCEES standards and how to improve their own educator effectiveness ratings. Additionally, 83% felt our current process for onboarding new and Beginning Teachers could be strengthened. Specific suggestions included Master Teachers who could provide ongoing, in-classroom coaching, peer observation, modeling, and co-teaching to highlight effective instructional methods for all teachers. Specific weaknesses cited included difficulties in teacher retention and teacher/leader absenteeism. Nearly 65% of those surveyed felt that our district needed to do a better job providing adequate compensation (financial and non-financial) for educator contributions towards student growth. Complete survey results can be found in *Appendix F. Table 8* shows identified gaps and how *EPIC* will address those gaps (described in *Section C*).

Table 8. Summary of Identified Gaps and Program Strategies	
Identified Gap	EPIC Program Strategies
Recruiting Diverse, Qualified Educators	In-and-out of state, HBCU, and online recruitment; International teachers; Grow our own; Financial and non-financial incentives
Orienting and Onboarding New Teachers and Leaders	Beginning Teacher (BT) effective practices orientation; BT Mentors; Targeted PD; Leadership Academy; Leader Mentors
Targeted Support for Teachers	Job-embedded PD through PLCs aligned with NCEES; Instructional Content & Technology Facilitators; Master Teachers; Summer PD
Challenging Working Environment	Educator collaboration and feedback; MTSS; Cultural Responsiveness PD; School climate PD; School Resource Officers
Staffing High Need Schools	Comprehensive PBCS with financial and non-financial rewards

(C) Quality of the Project Design

1) **Project demonstrates a rationale.** Our planning team conducted a literature review to align project activities with best-practice research on improving educator effectiveness to impact student achievement. We also developed a logic model that illustrates *EPIC's* strong theory and rationale linking program strategies, activities, and outputs to anticipated outcomes and long-term impact. An overview of key program strategies and their link to the evidence-base, including evidence of promise, follows in *Table 9*, while our *EPIC* logic model, can be found in *Appendix C*.

Table 9. Evidence-Base for <i>EPIC</i> Activities
Human Capital Management System: <u>Promising evidence</u> indicates HCMS practices can contribute to increased educator engagement, job satisfaction, and long-term professional development, which in turn, can positively impact student academic achievement. ^{59, 60}
Performance-Based Compensation System: <u>Promising evidence</u> indicates that PBCS can

improve teacher and school leader performance on educator evaluations leading to improved effectiveness ratings.⁶¹ It also increases principal retention of higher-performing school leaders and exiting of lower-performing principals.⁶² PBCS implementation has also been shown to have small, but positive impacts on student achievement in core academic subjects.⁶³

Professional Learning Communities: PLCs build collective responsibility for student learning, helping students achieve at higher levels, and producing higher levels of teacher satisfaction.⁶⁴ PD delivered in the context of a PLC has shown to be the most beneficial form of PD delivery and can improve teachers' practice and student achievement.⁶⁵ PLCs remediate weaknesses in the developing skills of new educators and has also shown to promote teacher retention.⁶⁶

Career Ladders: Student achievement was significantly higher in districts where teachers had career ladders, while also improving teacher recruitment and retention.^{67,68}

Increasing School Leader Effectiveness: Effective principals and school leaders are crucial to strengthening teaching and school communities and play a critical role in students' academic success by creating cultures of high expectations.⁶⁹ They play a direct role in impacting the quality of instruction in their schools through hiring decisions and providing instructional leadership which in turn help support and develop teachers and ultimately, improve student achievement.⁷⁰

2) **Project is appropriate to and will address needs.** Our needs assessment revealed gaps in our current HCMS, which are addressed by our key program components below.

Component 1: Onboarding ► **Strategy 1. Recruitment and Hiring:** UCPS has recently faced increased competition when recruiting teachers, including an ever-declining pool of available educators, particularly minority teachers, due to increased competition from other districts in our state and across the border in South Carolina. *EPIC* will address **Competitive Priority 2** by putting into place recruitment strategies designed to increase both educator diversity and the percentage

of effective and highly effective teachers and leaders in our target schools. We will begin by 1) conducting recruitment sessions at the 10 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in NC that offer teacher education programs. We will work with HBCU staff to identify students who are in the top-third of their graduating class and target these Beginning Teachers for recruitment to teach in one of our district's target schools beginning in late winter and early spring of each year. 2) We will use a similar approach in conducting recruitment at both in-state and out-of-state colleges and universities, seeking out beginning educators in the top-third of their class, as recommended by research, to increase our likelihood of recruiting novice teachers with the potential to become highly effective teachers.⁷¹ 3) We will also work through existing programs at the federal and state level including Educational Partners International, Visiting International Faculty Program, and International Teacher Exchange Services to identify highly-qualified international teachers, particularly those who are eligible to teach critical need subjects in our target schools, and who are fluent in Spanish to better connect with our target schools' large population of Hispanic students. Minority teachers are particularly well-positioned to serve as advocates and cultural brokers for students, their parents, and the community as they are more likely to share a common cultural background.^{72,73} 4) To further increase our odds in attracting and hiring diverse and qualified teachers and school leaders, we will begin offering our contracts earlier than typical for both our district and our state. 5) While we intend to offer enhanced compensation as part of the revisions to our current PBCS, we will also offer teachers new to our district who agree to teach in one of our target schools a variety of non-financial incentives, shown to be effective in recruiting teachers for hard-to-staff schools.⁷⁴ This will include guaranteed planning time, reduced class sizes, and additional in-classroom support from Master Teachers, Instructional Content Facilitators, and Instructional Technology Facilitators. 6) We will expand our current

online recruitment efforts, placing ads on social networking and career websites including education specific sites, and host virtual job fairs that will allow educators to chat with our recruiting staff and more easily apply for jobs online.⁷⁵ We will develop recruitment materials that reflect diversity and emphasize the financial and non-financial rewards possible within our district, such as career ladders, comprehensive support for beginning and new teachers to our district, and the advantages of living in our community, such as lower cost-of-living as compared to neighboring Charlotte. 7) We will implement a “Grow our Own” strategy designed to encourage existing minority teachers or teaching assistants in our district to earn degrees or certifications in hard-to-staff subject areas in partnership with the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. 8) We will actively recruit highly effective, experienced teachers in other schools within UCPS and in other districts for transfer to our highest-need schools and offer them an additional \$1,750 per year (locally funded). We are committed to creating and maintaining a diverse workforce, and anticipate that this wide-range of recruitment strategies that align with the NC Equity Plan, will further increase our district’s visibility, and attract a more diverse and highly-qualified applicant pool to our highest-need schools. ► **Strategy 2. Onboarding:** New teachers are most likely to leave the profession within their first five years of teaching.⁷⁶ To combat turnover and increase retention, *EPIC* will put into place the following activities to support Strategy 2 of our Onboarding process:

- 1) Beginning Teachers (BT) and teachers new to our district will attend a two-day *Beginning Teacher Effective Practices Orientation* prior to the start of the school year which will offer training on our instructional model, Gradual Release of Responsibility, assessments, classroom management, lesson planning, parent-teacher conferences, and an overview of available resources and supports. They will receive a general orientation to our district, including a segment on understanding the contexts of poverty and the challenges that our impoverished students face.
- 2)

BTs in *EPIC* schools will receive ongoing support for three academic years from their assigned mentor (an effective or highly effective teacher with at least 4 years of experience), preferably in the BT's same grade level or subject area. Mentors will serve as both a personal and professional resource for BTs, meeting with them weekly in Year 1, biweekly in Year 2, and monthly in Year 3. Mentors will help communicate district and school goals, policies, and procedures, including the NCEES process, the NC Standard Course of Study, and the State's ABC accountability model, plus available resources such as curriculum guides and the culture and values of UCPS and their assigned school. One study found that 92% of teachers assigned a mentor in their first year returned the next year and that 86% percent were still on the job five years later, compared to 84% and 71% respectively in teachers not assigned a mentor.⁷⁷ 3) BTs will receive monthly targeted supplemental PD on grade-level specific content. This will include attendance at four *New Teacher Support Institutes*, jointly sponsored by the NCDPI and UNC-Charlotte on topics aligned with the NCEES such as creating a respectful classroom environment for students, facilitating the learning process, and contributing to the academic success of students. School Leader Onboarding will include: 4) New Assistant Principals in our target schools will take part in a two-phased onboarding process, beginning in their first year with an AP Academy where district administrators meet monthly with new APs to cover a course of study on topics including instructional leadership, assessment data analysis, how to work with parents and the community effectively, and creating collaboration and shared decision-making in their schools. 5) We will also identify and target emerging school leaders throughout UCPS for inclusion in our Advanced Leadership Academy, which will meet monthly for focused study designed to prepare principal candidates to become an effective school leader, and targeting these individuals for future school leader positions in our *EPIC* schools. 6) New Principals in our target schools will be assigned a Mentor Principal in Years

1-3, meeting with them weekly in Year 1, biweekly in Year 2, and monthly in Year 3. 7) We will implement a new *Principal Academy* for principals new to the job or new to our district led by UCPS's Instructional and School Performance Directors. Topics will include: shaping a vision of academic success for all students based on high standards; creating a positive school climate; improving instruction; and managing people, data, and processes to optimize school improvements through use of autonomy in making staffing, budgeting, and scheduling decisions.⁷⁸

Component 2: Supporting The single most important variable in student achievement is the quality of daily instruction.⁷⁹ Significant impacts on student achievement result when individual variables, such as high-quality, effective teachers, challenging curricula, school-level supports for both students and teachers, and strong school leadership come together to create a critical mass.⁸⁰ A key element of *EPIC's* project design is building teacher and school leader capacity in our target schools designed to help educators increase and sustain their effectiveness and positively impact student academic achievement.⁸¹ A chief strategy in our approach will be professional development incorporating increased one-on-one and collegial support, as requested by educators in our needs assessment. Other findings have been incorporated into our project design which focuses on revisions and enhancements to existing PD and support mechanisms in our target schools and addresses **Competitive Priorities 1 and 2.** ► **Strategy 1. Job-Embedded PD:** 1) Our schools' PLCs, which meet weekly, will provide the existing structures within our target schools to deliver a more coherent and coordinated PD process. Facilitating group PD within our existing PLCs will allow teachers at all levels of experience and effectiveness to discuss and reflect on their professional practice and to identify how they can work to use these new methods and content knowledge to better impact student academic achievement.⁸² PLCs will focus on deepening subject-matter, understanding how students learn and the specific difficulties they may encounter,

and connect what our teachers are being asked to do with what they already know, to actively engage our educators in creating a supportive environment for collaborative professional development.⁸³ 2) Data-driven PD: Each school's leadership team will examine data from educator evaluations and student assessments to determine common problem areas. This information will then be used to develop coordinated and targeted PD in identified areas and for instructional improvements. 3) PD aligned with NCEES: Teachers and school leaders will also receive ongoing targeted PD specifically centered on the NCEES standards so that each educator understands each element of the evaluation standards and how to reach proficiency and beyond on each standard. PD opportunities aligned to educator evaluations improve educator practices and promote greater student achievement while increasing teacher retention.⁸⁴ 4) PD will include modeling, demonstrations, and peer feedback provided by our district's Instructional Content Facilitators, Instructional Technology Facilitators, and EPIC Master Teachers who will use coaching, modeling, and provide targeted feedback to support improvements at the school and teacher levels. 5) Master Teachers (MT): As part of *EPIC's* Career Ladder strategy, our schools will benefit from the addition of two MTs per school who are rated as highly effective educators with a proven track record of impacting student achievement growth. MTs will spend half their day in their regular class and half-day co-teaching with Beginning Teachers (BTs) and will provide peer observations for other teachers. This strategy will allow our most effective teachers to maintain an instructional role in our schools while positively impacting other educators in these schools. Additionally, it will expand the reach of effective teachers to more students in our target schools (**Competitive Priority 1**). Building collaborative teaching roles will allow our BTs the opportunity to think more deeply about the instructional process, plan for instruction, and determine how to effectively differentiate instruction for diverse students as they observe their MT delivering demonstration

lessons plus gain direct experience teaching.⁸⁵ MT will also work with other teachers in their schools, modeling effective strategies, teaching demonstration lessons, and providing observations, coaching and feedback designed to improve instructional practices schoolwide. 6) Summer Academies: All *EPIC* teachers will take part in a three-day annual Summer Institute to receive content-specific PD and work collaboratively to study student assessment data, update pacing guides, and develop lesson plans including identifying differentiated instructional strategies. ► **Strategy 2. Improving the School Learning and Working Environment**: The contexts in which teachers work profoundly shape their effectiveness.⁸⁶ 1) School context is the quality of relationships and collaboration among staff, the responsiveness of school administrators, and the academic and behavioral expectations for students.⁸⁷ Teachers who work in supportive contexts stay in the classroom longer and improve at faster rates than peers in less-supportive environments.⁸⁸ Factors contributing to supportive contexts within schools comprise those integrated throughout *EPIC*'s design including opportunities for peer collaboration, supportive principal leadership, effective PD, and fair teacher evaluation processes with meaningful feedback.⁸⁹ 2) Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT): Teachers and administrators often lack concrete professional learning to understand racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse students' unique learning needs which hinders them in providing appropriate instruction or interventions.⁹⁰ This can negatively impact students' academic achievement and eventual attainment.⁹¹ To better bridge the gap between our teachers, who are 85% Caucasian,⁹² and our diverse student body, which is 72% minority and 80% economically disadvantaged,⁹³ we will provide PD for all *EPIC* teachers in CRT designed to create more inclusive learning environments and close the subgroup achievement gap. 3) Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS): Students in our target schools exhibit disproportionately high rates of criminal acts and short and long-term suspensions. *EPIC*

will promote implementation of MTSS, a framework that promotes schoolwide academic and behavioral expectations of students. MTSS recognizes that student needs exist across a continuum and addresses these needs via a tiered framework to deliver academic and behavioral interventions and supports as students' academic performance and socio-emotional behaviors have a reciprocal influence on one another and the schoolwide learning environment.^{94,95} MTSS has been shown to reduce suspensions, expulsions, and behavioral referrals while boosting achievement, including subgroup achievement.^{96,97} It is also helpful in reducing racial disproportionality in school disciplinary actions while promoting development of protective factors, resulting in more positive student behaviors, and ultimately student achievement.^{98,99} Principals in UCPS have the autonomy to staff their schools, including MTSS Teams, which will consist of an administrator, counselor, teachers, and specialists who will meet monthly to identify student issues, implement interventions, and determine their effectiveness. We will improve our existing data portal to include behavioral data to inform MTSS implementation. Educators will also receive MTSS PD.

Component 3: Rewarding ► **Transfers to High Need Schools and Subject Areas:** 1) *EPIC* will offer effective and highly effective school leaders and core academic and high-need subject area teachers who agree to transfer to our lowest-performing schools an additional salary supplement each year, as outlined below in *Table 10*. Teachers and school leaders must agree to stay at least three years in these schools or forfeit paid compensation. This strategy addresses **Competitive Priority 1** by increasing equitable access to effective educators in our target low-performing, high-minority, high-poverty schools. As detailed in *(b) Need for the Project*, the most significant gaps in student access to effective teachers and leaders and the factors influencing these gaps were in resources, school climate, and educator support. *EPIC* was designed to close these gaps and align with NC's State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators, which recommended

increasing salaries and supplemental pay, targeting issues of discipline, providing comprehensive professional development on working with diverse students, improving working conditions, teacher and leader support programs including mentoring, and high-quality PD.¹⁰⁰ These elements have been interwoven into our *EPIC* project and are detailed throughout our proposal. Other elements in alignment with the Equity plan include increasing equitable access to high-quality teachers by using Union County’s Virtual School (UCVS), our district’s own interactive online learning program that incorporates rigor, relevance and relationships into all courses and uses our district’s most effective teachers, allowing them to extend their reach into our lowest-performing high schools. We will also use NC’s Virtual Public Schools to deliver instruction in our target middle and high schools, which is also delivered by effective or highly effective educators. Courses provided include AP, CTE, Credit Recovery, plus support for English Language Learners. As detailed above, we will also use Master Teachers co-teaching with BTs to increase access to effective educators. ► **Compensate Effective and Highly Effective Teachers:** *EPIC* will build off of UCPS’s current PBCS which provides supplements to teachers in high-need schools, and in certain subject areas. *EPIC* enhancements will provide teachers, principals, and assistant principals in our 13 high-need schools with increased compensation based on: 1) Measurable increases in student growth as measured by annual EVAAS results at the school and teacher levels; 2) The current educator effectiveness ratings scale (*Table 4 on Page 6*) will be expanded from three levels to four to allow for greater advancement, rewards, and growth targets. “Effective Teachers” will be divided into two levels with Level 1 scoring -1.99 – 0 on EVAAS and Level 2 scoring .01 – 1.99. 3) Other revisions to our PBCS will include taking on additional leadership responsibilities including Master Teachers, Beginning Teacher, and School Leader Mentors; 4) Recruitment of effective teachers to high-need schools and/or subjects; 5) Retention; and 6) Attendance.

Stakeholder involvement is essential to the design, implementation, and effectiveness of PBCS.¹⁰¹ To ensure that stakeholders have a voice in the design and determination of final components of the PBCS, in collaboration with our evaluator, we will conduct educator forums, focus groups, and monthly workgroups during Year 1 to provide input and feedback to inform needed revisions to our initial PBCS draft plan, outlined in *Table 10* below. Our project administration and staff, described in *Adequacy of Resources*, will work with UCPS’s HR and Financial Departments to facilitate the planning and development of concrete action plans to finalize our PBCS design. Workgroups will be selected during the first quarter of Year 1 and will be composed of a random sample of core teachers, non-core teachers, leaders, and staff from across our high-need schools. Input will be gathered annually to find out what worked, what did not, for whom, and why. This information will then be used to make any needed modifications. The final PBCS design may vary from our initial draft, but will include a combination of the following:

Table 10. Enhanced Performance-Based Compensation System		
Role	Description	Annual Amount
Core Teachers	Rated effective <i>Level 1</i> (NCEES) / <i>Level 2</i> (NCEES)	██████████
	Rated highly effective (NCEES)	██████
Non-Core Teachers	Based on schoolwide growth (Met) / (Exceeds)	██████████
Principals and APs	Rated effective (NCEES) / highly effective (NCEES)	██████████
Principal Mentors	For mentoring principals in their first three years	██████████
Beginning Teacher	For mentoring 1 BT / For mentoring 2 BTs	██████████
Mentors (BTs)	For mentees who Met growth / Exceeded growth	██████████
Hard-to-Staff Subjects Transfers	Teachers rated effective or highly effective who teach hard-to-staff subjects will receive a transfer bonus	██████

Educators in High-Need Schools	Annual local stipend for teachers and leaders in our highest need schools (i.e., <i>EPIC</i> schools)	██████
State-Supported Incentives	Funds for 3 rd Grade Reading, AP, IB, and CTE teachers based on student performance	Determined by the State (Varies)
Facilitator Leadership Roles	Lead ICFs will receive a bonus for leading personalized coaching across schools	██████
Teacher Leadership Roles	Stipends to effective and highly effective teachers who take on additional responsibilities in their schools	██████
Attendance	For effective and highly effective teachers who limit their number of annual absences	0-4 Days: ██████
		5-10 Days: ██████

► ***EPIC Career Ladder:*** The lack of career pathways presents a barrier to retaining teachers, particularly the best ones.¹⁰² *EPIC* will provide incentives for teachers to take on new leadership roles or for taking on additional responsibilities. 1) This includes opportunities for teachers rated as effective or highly effective who have been a teacher for at least 4 years to become a Teacher Mentor for BTs in our district. Mentors will meet regularly with their mentee during their first three years as an educator and serve as a resource for BTs, helping to communicate and orient them to key district, school, and state policies and procedures. 2) We will identify and assign at least two Master Teachers per target school who will co-teach with each new cohort of BTs, provide PD for all teachers in the school as they will serve as instructional leaders in PLC meetings, and provide demonstration lessons and observations for novice and experienced teachers designed to increase educator effectiveness schoolwide. 3) Principal Mentors will also be rewarded for mentoring new principals in our schools during their first three years in the role. 4) Additional Leadership Roles will allow teachers to take on new responsibilities including supporting

academic-related clubs in our target schools and/or facilitating creation of parent-teacher associations in our schools to enhance the school environment and improve school climates.

3) **Grant activities will be evaluated, monitored, and reported.** In addition to the required GPRAs, EPIC performance measures have been written with annual benchmarks to monitor progress.

Table 11. EPIC Goals and Objectives
Goal 1: Redesign our district’s existing HCMS and PBCS
1: By the end of Year 2, staff diversity will increase by 3%, increasing by 5% in each of Years 3-5, or until there is a 25% increase. <i>Measure: Annual district administrative data.</i>
2: The gap between educators receiving PBC and the retention rate of educators in each high-need school will decrease by 3 percentage points by the end of Year 2, decreasing by 3% in each of Years 3-5, or until the gap is no more than 11%. <i>Measure: Annual PBC data.</i>
3: By the end of Year 2, no more than 10% of teachers rated Accomplished or Distinguished will transfer out of our high-need schools, decreasing by 2 percentage points in each of Years 3-5, or until less than 5% transfer. <i>Measure: Annual HCMS data.</i>
4: By the end of Year 2, no more than 10% of teachers rated Accomplished or Distinguished will be absent for more than 4 days, decreasing by 2% in each of Years 3-5, or until less than 98% of teachers are absent more than 4 days. <i>Measure: Annual administrative records.</i>
5: By the end of Year 2, and each year thereafter, UCPS will use its educator evaluation system to inform at least six of the following HCMS decisions: recruitment, hiring, placement, retention, dismissal, PD, tenure, or promotion. <i>Measure: Annual HCMS data.</i>
6: By the end of Year 2 and each year thereafter, no less than 75% of all EPIC teachers will earn a PBC incentive. <i>Measure: Annual HCMS data.</i>
7: At least 90% of survey respondents will report having had input into the development of the

PBCS by the end of Year 1. Measure: <i>Evaluator constructed survey.</i>
8: By the end of Year 1, no less than 90% of survey respondents will demonstrate a clear understanding of the PBCS. Measure: <i>Evaluator constructed survey.</i>
9: By the end of Year 2, at least 75% of teachers and principals will report the PBCS to be clear, fair, and achievable, increasing by 5 percentage points in each of Years 3-5, or until 90% share this opinion. Measure: <i>Annual evaluator constructed survey.</i>
10: By the end of Year 1, UCPS will have in place a redesigned HCMS linking data from educator evaluations, PD, HR, and student achievement. Measure: <i>Operational HCMS.</i>
11: By the end of Year 1, UCPS will have in place a redesigned comprehensive PBCS linked to the HCMS. Measure: <i>Operational PBCS.</i>
12: Beginning in Year 2, the percentage of staff and students in <i>EPIC</i> schools who report that school climate is positive will increase by 5 percentage points, increasing by 5 points in Years 3-5, or until 90% report a positive climate. Measure: <i>Annual Climate Survey.</i>
Goal 2: Develop and increase teacher and school leader effectiveness
13: By the end of Year 2, at least 75% of teachers and principals will report that the data from their evaluation is “very useful” in identifying PD needed activities, increasing by 5 percentage points in each of Years 3-5, or until reaching 90%. Measure: <i>Evaluator constructed survey.</i>
14: By the end of Year 3, at least 75% of teachers and principals will have completed the PD activities prescribed in their effectiveness evaluation, increasing by 5 percentage points in each of Years 4-5, or until reaching 85%. Measure: <i>Annual administrative records.</i>
15: 50% of teachers scoring below Accomplished in Year 2 will advance at least 1 level in Year 3, increasing by 5 percentage points each year, or until reaching 60%. Measure: <i>HCMS data.</i>
16: By the end of Year 3, students will demonstrate an increase in Math and Reading scores by 2

points, increasing by 3 points in Years 4-5. *Measure: Annual academic data.*

► **Evaluating and Monitoring:** Our primary evaluation components are depicted via our logic model (*Appendix C*), which will be used to guide *EPIC*'s design and development from beginning to end. The model provides a logical base from which to conduct the program evaluation, spell out desired outcomes, and dissect the crucial pieces of our plan, including program inputs, activities, outputs, and the extent to which activities have targeted their intended audience.¹⁰³ Logic models also set the stage for successful evaluation by clarifying expectations, identifying key evaluation questions, and ensuring alignment between the activities and the performance goals and objectives.¹⁰⁴ Our logic model's underlying theory of change is based on motivation theory—people will change their behavior to increase the likelihood they will receive an incentive. *EPIC*'s theory of change connects performance pay with improved student academic growth and is highly dependent upon educator perceptions, cognitions, and beliefs.¹⁰⁵

► **Formative and Summative Evaluation:** Efforts will include formative and summative evaluation to assess progress in achieving program outcomes and objectives and provide feedback to guide implementation and make mid-course corrections. The extent to which any program achieves its desired outcomes is strongly linked to the fidelity of implementation.¹⁰⁶ Formative evaluation will assess the type, quality, and quantity of activities being delivered (expressed in frequency, intensity, and duration); the extent to which targeted participants are exposed to and are engaged in activities; and the reactions of key stakeholder groups, such as administrators, teachers, and students, to these activities. Reactions are defined as participants' cognitions, opinions, and beliefs that would be expected to change with program exposure. Assessing reactions throughout our program's life cycle is important as PBCS cannot be sustained in a climate of negative reactions from key stakeholders. The key questions we will use to assess stakeholder reactions, include the extent to

which teachers and school leaders: 1) are aware of, understand, and accept *EPIC* goals; 2) believe they have the competencies, resources, and support to succeed; 3) trust that positive consequences, including rewards and recognition, will result from their success; 4) value the rewards; and 5) understand their performance results, accept the validity of the results, and recognize why they did or did not receive PBC. Our overarching summative question is how, if at all, did the PBCS affect student performance? The summative evaluation will use a short-term interrupted time series design with a comparison group (SITS-C) to assess program impact on school-level standardized achievement scores in math and reading for Grades 4 and 8, and the ACT for Grade 11. The SITS-C design measures program impacts on student performance by comparing standardized test scores for a number of annual student cohorts in a specific grade after a reform is launched (its follow-up period) with the scores of cohorts from several years before the reform was launched (baseline).¹⁰⁷ Impact is measured as a deviation, or difference, from the past pattern of performance. To further increase results confidence, we will use propensity-score matching using key variables such as school level, ethnicity, percent eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and dollars spent per pupil to identify a comparison group of 13 high-need schools in neighboring school districts. We will compare trend data for all schools five years before and three years after the program's implementation. Deviation differences from actual versus past performance in *EPIC* schools and comparison schools will be used to determine impact. Although this type of summative data will not be available until 2019-20, we are committed to assessing our program's impact and, to the extent possible, data for grade levels in addition to Grades 4, 8, and 11 will be added to capture variation between grades. ► **Methods:** Our evaluation incorporates a mixed-methods approach that will triangulate our data and significantly contribute to the validity of the evaluation process.¹⁰⁸ Combining qualitative and quantitative methods will increase the depth of our information and

provide feedback that will enable us to make critical mid-course corrections and program adjustments in a timely manner. Quantitative data sources include student standardized test scores; teacher attendance, promotion, turnover, and retention rates; and surveys that include scale items measuring teachers' cognitions, opinions, and beliefs. Qualitative data sources include interviews, focus groups, open-ended survey questions, and project meetings minutes. Interviews with key school- and district-level leaders, including the Project Director, principals, and Management Team, will assess their role in building awareness, communicating goals, promoting effective communication strategies, supporting implementation of the program, and will gauge their perceived outcomes of the program, including its effects on teaching and any unexpected or unintended consequences. Educator focus groups will be conducted to assess general reactions to the program, identify areas of concern and how best to address these concerns, and assess the extent to which the PBC influences teaching, as well as the decision to return to (or leave) the high-need school. ► **Data Analysis:** Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages). Parametric and non-parametric inferential statistics (chi square, t-tests, ANOVAs) will be used where appropriate, and effect sizes will be computed between groups. Results will be reported in aggregate and disaggregated by school to promote utilization at the school-level. Qualitative data will be coded and analyzed thematically to gain a richer and deeper understanding of stakeholder reactions. ► **Reporting and Continuous Performance Feedback:** *EPIC's* success relies heavily on continuous high-quality feedback. The independent evaluator will participate in monthly Management Team meetings to build consensus on critical evaluation questions, methods, instruments, data collection protocols, and reporting formats. Evaluation results will be shared via a data dashboard with charts and graphs for ease of interpretation as well as through interim and annual reports, survey, and focus group snapshots,

and in-person briefings provided by our evaluator to the board, administrators, principals, and project staff. This participatory approach builds stakeholders ownership, increasing the likelihood that results will be used to improve the program and achieve positive outcomes.

(D) Quality of the Management Plan

EPIC's project design includes critical management structures to conduct program monitoring and ensure project components are effectively implemented. Our management structures include: 1) *EPIC* Management Team (*EMT*) will meet monthly to ensure ongoing program management and will include our Directors of: Elementary and Secondary Education, Professional Development, Accountability and Student Services, AIG and Federal Programs and representative principals, teachers, and ICFs (*Appendix D*: resumes and job descriptions). The *EMT* will be responsible for review of evaluation findings to inform strategic decision-making including course-corrections to support successful program implementation. They will identify best practices to improve student achievement and educator effectiveness and oversee usage of district, state, and federal funds. They will also develop a long-term sustainability plan to ensure continuation of *EPIC* program components once grant funding has ended. 2) A full-time, Master's level Project Director (*PD*) will oversee our program, coordinate implementation, lead our management team, provide fiscal management and accountability, comply with program requirements, coordinate communication, supervise program staff, engage in progress monitoring with evaluators, and cultivate vendor and partner relationships. 3) Our existing Human Resources Team (*HR*) will meet monthly to guide implementation of *HCMS* modifications including using *EPIC* evaluation data and lessons learned to better inform human capital decision-making to revise and refine existing district policies. 4) A full-time Compensation Analyst (*CA*) will be hired to provide professional development on using *EVAAS* data to inform coaching, maintain accurate reporting to comply with federal requirements,

manage student assessment and teacher and leader evaluation data, and engage in specialized tasks related to employee compensation and report development and dissemination for target schools.

5) Nine in-kind Instructional Content Facilitators (ICF) will serve as core content or grade level coaches to model effective instructional strategies and provide one-on-one, customized PD based on teacher evaluations. 6) Eleven in-kind Instructional Technology Facilitators (ITF) will provide coaching and PD that incorporates technology into curriculum and instruction via our PLCs. 7) Master Teachers: (MT) Two Master Teachers will be identified at *each* school through our Career Ladder strategy and will be effective or highly effective teachers who will lead the BT program at their schools, using co-teaching for a cohort of new teachers each year on a rotating basis. 8) The Evaluation Group (TEG), identified through an open and competitive procurement process that complies with the requirements of 2 CFR 200.317-200.326 and UCPS policies, will conduct a rigorous SITS-C impact study to gauge program effectiveness and disseminate findings for continuous improvement and replication. Our 5-year management plan follows in *Table 12*.

Table 12. EPIC Management Plan (October 1 – September 30)		
Milestones	Timeline	Responsibility
Overarching Project Management (2017-22)		
Confirm grant timeline and hire staff (PD, CA, MT)	10/17 – 12/17	EMT
Study data to inform HCMS modifications	Begin 10/17, weekly	EMT, HR
Create professional development schedule	Begin 11/17, annually	EMT, PD
Conduct program evaluation (data analysis, tools)	Begin 11/17, ongoing	TEG
Design stakeholder input and feedback plan	12/17 – 1/18	PD, TEG
Convene management team	Begin 12/17, monthly	PD
Maintain programmatic reporting to ED	Begin 12/17, ongoing	CA, PD

Oversee compensation, contracts, staff database	Begin 12/17, ongoing	CA, HR
Solicit input on HCMS, PBCS (focus group, survey)	1/18-9/18, monthly	PD, TEG
Identify key HCMS, PBCS modifications	1/18-3/18	EMT
Develop written sustainability plan	Begin 10/18, quarterly	EMT
ONBOARDING (Recruiting, Hiring, Orientation)		
Identify/implement retention process improvements	2/18	EMT
Identify recruitment improvements	3/18	EMT
Revise and define recruitment strategy	4/18	EMT
Identify hiring process improvements	5/18	EMT
Implement recruitment strategies	Begin 6/18, ongoing	PD
Develop revised hiring process plan	7/18	EMT
Implement coaching process	8/18	PD, ICFs, ITFs,
SUPPORTING (Professional Development)		
Provide PD on coaching and mentoring	11/17, ongoing	MT, PD
Develop schoolwide and targeted PD plans	Begin 12/17, quarterly	EMT, MT
Implement school-wide PD	Begin 1/18, ongoing	PLCs, ICFs, ITFs
Provide individualized coaching based on NCEES	Begin 1/18, ongoing	MT, ICFs, IFTs
Model and coach effective instructional strategies	Begin 1/18, monthly	MT, ICFs, ITFs
Provide training on using EVAAS data	1/18, ongoing	CA
Assist in educator observation process	1/18, ongoing	EMT, ICFs, ITFs
Identify PD needs from NCEES evaluations	1/18, ongoing	SLT, EMT
Identify effective educators as mentors	10/18, ongoing	EMT, PD
REWARDING (Place, Compensate, Promote)		

Refine potential metrics and incentives	1/18-5/18	EMT, CA
Implement educator focus groups	1/18-3/18, annually	TEG
Incorporate feedback from focus groups into HCMS	1/18, annually	PD, HR, EMT
Identify effective or highly effective educators	1/18, annually	SLT, PD
Define leadership roles through PBCS	1/18-5/18	EMT
Develop list of potential educators for transfers	2/18, annually	PD, SLT
Recruit identified educators for transfer	3/18-5/18, annually	HR, PD
Create plan for Career Ladder positions	5/18	EMT
Establish PBCS metrics based on educator input	6/18, annually	EMT, PD
Complete transfer of effective educators	8/18, annually	HR, PD
Provide access to top teachers via online courses	Begin 8/18, ongoing	EMT, HR, PD
Implement enhanced HCMS	Begin 10/18, ongoing	HR
Begin full implementation of PBCS with payouts	10/18-9/19 (Y2)	MT, PD, HR
Solicit stakeholder feedback on revised HCMS	Begin 1/19, quarterly	PD, TEG
Adjust HCMS based on stakeholder input	Begin 2/19, quarterly	EMT, HR

(E) Adequacy of Resources

- 1) **Potential for continued support.** EPIC was designed to ensure long-term sustainability by: engaging community support, building internal capacity, and aligning with State and district initiatives for financial stability. ► **Community Support:** Letters of commitment from our partners (*Appendix E*) highlight ongoing support and matching funds (**Requirement 2**), including:
- 1) Union County Educational Foundation, a local non-profit, provides funding to teachers to purchase technology and curriculum enhancements to help sustain our material and supply needs.
 - 2) UNC-C provides access to continuing education and professional development to sustain

professional development and teacher growth. 3) NCDPI provides support to enhance curriculum and instruction, accountability, teacher and administrator preparation and licensing, and PD efforts aligning to increased educator effectiveness on the NCEES to increase educator capacity. 4) Union County will continue providing School Resource Officers in target *EPIC* schools to help improve school climate and educator working conditions. ► **Capacity Building:** *EPIC* was designed to build local capacity through training and support to ensure that grant strategies implemented will continue after grant funding ends. Our in-kind ICFs and ITFs have pledged their ongoing support (*Appendix E*) and will use teacher evaluation results to provide job-embedded targeted coaching and support to teachers in *EPIC* schools during and after the grant. Two Master Teachers at each school will work with Beginning Teachers to build their skill sets, which over time, will increase schoolwide instructional capacity. Through our HR and Curriculum Teams, we have dedicated the time of locally funded executive staff to support implementation and sustainability including long-term plans to revise educator support and compensation systems districtwide using lessons learned from *EPIC*. ► **Aligned to Existing Initiatives:** *EPIC* sustainability is significantly strengthened due to the alignment to human capital processes currently in place to support an integrated system beyond the grant. NC has demonstrated a commitment to PBC by funding bonuses to 3rd grade, AP, IB, and CTE teachers, and locally our PBCS includes paying annual stipends of \$1,750 to educators in our high-need schools for recruitment and retention. We are committed to continuing this effort as a component of our PBCS as indicated by our Superintendent and Board (*Appendix E*). Matching funds for *EPIC* total \$23.4 million (**Requirement 2**) and align with program goals. Local funding will be leveraged to support MTSS including Behavioral Management Technicians, instructional materials, and coaching, as will funding to promote increased student achievement such as Reading Recovery, Interventionists, and tutoring as detailed in our *Budget Narrative*.

2) ***Incorporating project into the ongoing program***. Independent evaluation by a team of Ph.D. evaluators will provide objective, ongoing, formative feedback about the implementation progress and impact on student achievement and educator effectiveness. While each *EPIC* strategy is backed by a strong research base, we will use evaluation findings to pinpoint which strategies are most effective in improving educator effectiveness and ultimately student achievement which will be incorporated into district processes and annual budgets including which strategies to sustain and which to revise or eliminate. While our program and budget were designed to build long-term capacity, we will engage experts to develop a written sustainability plan with aligned action plans and resource allocation charts starting in Year 1 and evolving throughout implementation as we identify and isolate effective strategies. We will also reevaluate other human capital investments over the five-year period to identify funds that could be reallocated to support long-term sustainability. ► **Grant-Specific:** Once *EPIC* ends, line items specific to grant implementation will be eliminated including: Project Director, Compensation Analyst, local travel, grant meetings, technology, evaluation, capacity building, and indirect costs. ► **Embedded Strategies:** Our one-time investment in the development of a HCMS platform will be functional beyond the grant period as will data collection and evaluation tools. Once PTAs and clubs are established in each school, stipends for these additional roles will be eliminated. Likewise, the added responsibilities for Lead ICFs will diminish overtime as capacity is built across school staff. We anticipate enhancements to our BT program, mentor components, recruitment efforts, and PD offerings will show successful results and thus become “business as usual” as we increase teacher and school leader effectiveness to positively impact student academic achievement. ► Throughout *EPIC*’s lifespan, lessons learned will inform revisions to our HCMS and PBCS in 40 additional schools in UCPS, helping to further increase educator effectiveness and improve student achievement for all.