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## **Uplift Education is a High-Quality Applicant**

Uplift Education is the largest public charter school network in North Texas. Established in 1996 with one school in Irving, Uplift has grown to a network serving over 22,000 scholars in Pre-K through 12th grade at 46 schools on 21 campuses in the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex. (Dallas, DeSoto, Irving, Grand Prairie, Arlington, and Fort Worth). Uplift's mission is to create and sustain public schools of excellence that empower students to reach their highest potential in college and the global marketplace and that inspire in students a life-long love of learning, achievement, and service in order to positively change their world.

Our schools are deliberately located in low-income, urban neighborhoods in order to create more equitable opportunities for families in these communities to receive a college- and career-focused education for their children. At every grade level, Uplift takes a holistic, “Whole Scholar” approach to education that sees each student as a unique individual and supports their academic, social, and emotional well-being. This dedication addresses disparities in educational resources and outcomes for low-income and urban communities and the root cause of student disengagement in order to provide high-quality education that meets student needs.

Uplift offers students of any background the powerful chance to study within a multidisciplinary curriculum and prepare for the college education and successful career they deserve. Currently, 100% of Uplift’s eligible primary, middle and high schools are International Baccalaureate® (IB) authorized, making Uplift the largest IB district in Texas and the second largest in the nation. Uplift’s Whole Scholar approach is also at work in the curriculum and academics through the fostering of strong scholar culture, our dedication to connecting families, and our unmatched college and career preparation program. Because of this work, 100% of Uplift’s eligible high schools were named among the Best High Schools in the nation by the U.S. News & World Report for 2020.

**Our goal is to completely CLOSE the achievement gap between students, regardless of their ethnic or socio-economic background, while ensuring that 100% of our students graduate and enroll in college.** Uplift’s big goal is for 70% of its graduates—most of whom will be first-generation college-goers—to earn a college degree within six years. (Currently 55% of Uplift alumni achieve this milestone—four times the national average for their peer group.)

Our student population is 21% Black, 67% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 3% white, and 2% other races. Approximately 80% are from low-income households and are eligible for participation in the free and reduced-price meals program. We define “high-needs students” as those who are from low-income households, are at risk of failing due to social or academic issues, have disabilities, speak a language other than English at home, or are from underserved minority groups.

### **Priorities Addressed**

This EIR Early Phase project, to be known as *Path to Purpose*, addresses **Absolute Priority 1: Demonstrates a Rationale** (see Logic Model in Appendix G), **and Absolute Priority 4: Field-Initiated Innovations Fostering Knowledge and Promoting the Development of Skills That Prepare Students To Be Informed, Thoughtful, and Productive Individuals and Citizens** (by promoting social and emotional learning skills among high-need students in K-8).

The project design (and the Uplift network as a whole) also addresses **Competitive Preference Priority 2: Innovative Approaches to Addressing the Impact of COVID–19 on Underserved Students and Educators** and **Competitive Preference Priority 3: Promoting Equity and Adequacy in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities** through a myriad of strategies, policies, protocols, and activities. Please see **Appendix J-1** for documentation on both of these competitive preference priorities.

## A. Significance

Since its inception, Uplift Education has responded to a deep call to transform the lives of young people—our scholars—across one of America’s largest and neediest metroplexes. Our service to a demographic whose complexion is fraught with risk and disadvantages has resulted in a commitment to achieve something uncommon on their behalf: the empowerment of rising generations who take their place in the world and transform it for the good. The need to serve them has not changed and we continue to stay the course in pursuit of our vision and values.

Uplift Education is a leader across DFW school systems in promoting the holistic development of its scholars. Uplift not only ensures that its scholars have access to a mental health counselor and health clinic in each of its 46 schools but is also intentional about supporting high-quality, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and prevention programming as well as restorative practices—collectively an approach to overall well-being. Based on a very successful first year roll-out, Uplift is poised to build on its current foundation by deepening work in the realm of scholar well-being while also developing and implementing new approaches to supporting the adults on the front lines of working with children and students on a day-to-day basis. Uplift Education has prioritized the addition of character education for all of its scholars in SY 2021-2022.

Campus- and network-based supports include well-being assemblies, marketing campaigns and collateral materials to support and reinforce well-being as a learnable skill, and an altered schedule with early dismissal of school every second Wednesday of the month so staff and scholars can focus on aspects of their own well-being.

## **(1) The proposed project involves promising new strategies**

Uplift endeavors to teach SEL, well-being and character to empower all scholars to use those skills every day, ultimately helping them attain flourishing lives while they are in school and after they graduate. We expect that through the adults on our teams who are taught how to deliver this essential knowledge to our students, we will be able to have positive generational impact as it relates to well-being.

The **promising new strategies** we are proposing in this EIR project, to be known as *Path to Purpose*, include the following:

1. **Deploy 6 individual Well-Being and SEL Leads** to ensure consistent implementation at the school level in collaboration with the Well-Being and SEL team; this will create a “Well-Being and SEL” department chair role<sup>1</sup> on each campus, which elevates the urgency of this work in parallel with academics.
2. **Develop a scope and sequence** to design and map the competencies and skills that Uplift intends for its scholars to attain, **encompassing well-being, SEL, the IB learner profile, and character development.**
3. **Deploy Well-Being and SEL Instructional Coaches** to provide ongoing professional development; support elementary and middle schools in building teacher and leader capacity in character and SEL implementation, internalization, and culturalization at the local school level; and ensure fidelity of SEL assessment.
4. **Focus on high-dosage delivery of Second Step curriculum in grades K-8** (3 elementary and 3 middle school campuses will comprise the treatment group; the control

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<sup>1</sup> Department chairs within the Uplift network receive \$1,000 stipends per year to perform their additional leadership responsibilities.

group will be all other schools at these levels, which will receive the current business as usual SEL curriculum).

5. **Assess the impact of high dosage SEL instruction on academic growth and achievement, including narrowing achievement gaps between student subgroups** (Black, Hispanic, White, low-income, students with disabilities) by triangulating data from the Rhithm dashboard (see **Appendix J-2** for images); Panorama survey results (such as those measuring students' perceptions of climate, engagement, relationships and belonging); and standardized test data, including NWEA MAP and the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness/End-of-Course exams (STAAR/EOC). Please see **Appendix J-3** for a complete list of Panorama survey topics, and **Appendix J-4** for Uplift's assessment frameworks for elementary and middle schools.

**(2) Dissemination of project results will enable others to use the information or strategies**

Uplift Education participates in several **national and regional educational networks** that educate and/or support a similar body of high-need students and will serve as excellent channels for broad dissemination of project success, including The Bill & Melinda Gates Ensemble Learning cohort; Aspen Institute's Pahara Fellowship; the Charter School Growth Fund; The Broad Fellowship for Education Leaders; the Principal Impact Collaborative; and college and university partners. In addition, Uplift will share takeaways with traditional public-school districts in Dallas and Tarrant Counties through collaborative organizations like the District Charter Alliance and Fort Worth Education Partners.

Uplift will also disseminate information on project challenges and successes by hosting **site visits** and participating in and presenting at **conferences** hosted by the Texas Conference for School Administrators, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Texas Charter School Association, National Social and Emotional Learning Alliance for the United States (SEL4US),

Center for the Promotion of Social & Emotional Learning, and others. The *Path to Purpose* Project Director will **network with other project leaders** throughout the funding period. Additionally, Uplift and Copia Consulting will explore collaborations that will further **disseminate project results in the research and evaluation community** through conference presentations, symposia, and white papers.

**Locally**, Uplift will disseminate information on project implementation and interim and final results to stakeholders, including its **Board of Directors, leaders, teachers, parents, and students** via its website, newsletters, social media sites, and in-person meetings as appropriate.

## B. High-Quality Project Design

### (1) Conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities

Prior to the Pandemic—and especially in the wake of it—anxiety and depression have been on the rise among school aged children in America.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Uplift scholars are reporting a deeper sense of loneliness, alienation, and disengagement because of disrupted routines and approaches to education. Uplift Education proposes to develop and implement an innovative approach to supporting teacher and scholar SEL at the elementary and middle school levels in order to create a strong foundation for improving scholar engagement and holistic well-being.

According to Aristotle, *eudaimonia*—well-being—is the highest end, and all subordinate goals are sought because they promote well-being. He further stated that what we need in order to be and live well, is a proper appreciation of the way in which such goods as friendship, health, virtue, and excellence fit together as a whole. Through certain habits, we must acquire the ability

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/features/anxiety-depression-children.html#:~:text=Anxiety%20and%20depression%20have%20increased,8.4%25%20in%202011%E2%80%932012>

to see which courses of action are best supported by reason. Therefore, practical wisdom—*phronesis*—entails, through repetition, those deliberative, emotional, and social skills that enable us to put *eudaimonia* into practice in ways that are suitable to each occasion.

In November of 2019, Uplift Education launched a eudaimonic press—its focus on total well-being for its staff and scholars—with the hire of the nation’s first, school district-based Chief Well-Being and SEL Officer. Since then, Uplift Education has engaged in a “moonshot” strategy to upskill its 2,500 staff in well-being and SEL practices in order to culture its schools and central office around eudaimonia as a necessary condition for scholar and adult success.

At the scholar or student level, the eudaimonic press began with sensemaking and the push for coherence around why well-being and social emotional learning matters and how it can be seamlessly integrated into Uplift’s International Baccalaureate approach to learning. A scale-up strategy has been underway to create the necessary structural conditions necessary to enable social competency and skill attainment. For example, Uplift’s K-8<sup>th</sup> graders are focusing on the systematic use of the *Second Step* curriculum, while its 9-10<sup>th</sup> graders focus on *Journey*, and its high schools focus on purpose-based education and *Project Wayfinder*. Ensuring coherent curricular adoption and implementation was the necessary first step. In addition, Uplift created implementation cohorts and pilot programs across all grade levels to ensure flexibility and differentiation according to campus and scholar needs. As a means to having shared teacher practices that could be woven in authentically throughout the day, Uplift created and scaled its Uplift 5 signature SEL practices—warm welcomes, emotion check-ins, movement, mindful moments, and optimistic closures.

To take the work to the next level, it is important that the Well-Being and SEL Team grow to support all campuses with well-being and SEL competency and skills acquisition through

systemic capacity-building. We must begin developing a design model that is inclusive of staff and scholar acquisition of the intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues needed to support the learning of practical wisdom and ultimately paving the way for deeper flourishing and well-being. Through this deeper capacity building around character and SEL, we will help teachers more naturally connect their teaching to the **IB Learner Profile** (graphic on following page) and to be able to assess scholar proficiency of these traits over time. Moreover, we understand the rich opportunity that we have in being a large network deeply committed to implementing the IB programs of study in grades K-12 to deeply interweave the development of IB learner profile traits throughout a scholar's academic tenure at Uplift. By having a more robust SEL Team working in partnerships with dedicated campus practitioners, we can also ensure the intentional integration of the IB Learner Profile, which will support the seamless integration of character development in each classroom, during each day, on every Uplift campus, for all scholars.

More than two decades of research demonstrates that education promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) gets results. The findings come from multiple fields and sources,



including student achievement, neuroscience, health, employment, psychology, classroom management, learning theory, economics, and the prevention of youth problem behaviors.

SEL interventions that address CASEL’s five core competencies increased students’ academic performance by 11 percentile points, compared to students who did not participate in such SEL programs. Students participating in SEL programs also showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school.<sup>3</sup>

The design of *Path to Purpose* features the following six interventions for the treatment schools:

1. **Increased explicit SEL instruction** (using the research-based curriculum, Second Step) during the week by teachers versus control (2 days a week to 3-4 days per week).
2. **Increased ongoing observation and feedback cycles** by SEL instructional coaches (using Rhithm, Panorama, Academic, and Observational data).
3. **Increased social-behavioral counseling sessions** (based on Rhithm, Panorama, and counselor referral data system).
4. **Family therapy** provided to treatment families (based on Rhithm, Panorama, and counselor referral data system).
5. **Enhanced health services and telemedicine** provided to families through partnership with Children’s Health (based on Rhithm and SchoolMint health data system).
6. **Increased contact time with restorative specialists** based on emergence of disruptive

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<sup>3</sup> Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D. & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1): 405–432.

behavior (based on PowerSchool and Hero behavior data systems).

**(2) The goals, objectives, and outcomes are clearly specified and measurable**

As an organization, two of Uplift’s primary metrics are to have 70% of alumni earning a college degree within six years of high school completion, as measured through National Student Clearinghouse and self-reported student data; and 90% of alumni earning an economically viable post-secondary credential (including a 2-year, 4-year degree or vocational certification). These ambitious targets align with our mission to empower students to reach their highest potential in college and the global marketplace, and they guide our work on a daily basis.

**Uplift pursues these accomplishments through a data-driven focus, use of the International Baccalaureate (IB) curricular framework for learning, college and career preparation, and implementation of social and emotional learning supports including those detailed in this proposal.** We continue to fine-tune our work around college and career readiness for all scholars to achieve our goals. However, developing students’ social-emotional skills has been shown to improve academic performance and provide students with a solid foundation for achieving success in post-secondary environments and in the workplace.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, SEL work is an important component of our college and career readiness work and in achieving our two primary goals. We will continue to pioneer practices of SEL and well-being.

**The overarching project goal of *Path to Purpose* is to create, test, and refine SEL interventions through the deployment of promising new strategies that increase social and emotional skills, decrease disciplinary incidents, increase attendance, and increase**

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<sup>4</sup> Springboard for Success: How Social and Emotional Learning Helps Students in Getting to, Through and Beyond College. ETS Policy Brief. Accessed at <https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICPNV25N2.PDF>

**academic achievement for students; improve school climate; increase staff retention; and increase overall well-being for students and teachers.**

The following tables detail the goals and related measurable objectives for this EIR project with targets by project year.

<b>GOAL 1: IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE</b>					
<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>YEAR 1</b>	<b>YEAR 2</b>	<b>YEAR 3</b>	<b>YEAR 4</b>	<b>YEAR 5</b>
a) Increase the % of students who Feel they Belong	Baseline	55%	60%	65%	70%
b) Increase the % of students who Demonstrate Resilience	Baseline	45%	50%	55%	60%
c) Increase the % of students who Build Positive Relationships	Baseline	55%	60%	65%	70%
d) Reduce overall, Tier 1 disciplinary referrals by 10%	Baseline	-2%	-5%	-7%	-10%
e) Reduce in-school suspensions by at least 15%	Baseline	-5%	-7%	-10%	-15%
f) Increase overall student attendance to 97%	96%	96.2%	96.4%	96.7%	97%
g) Increase staff retention to at least 80% in all treatment schools	74%	75%	77%	79%	80%

<b>GOAL 2: IMPROVE STUDENT ACADEMIC GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT</b>					
<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>YEAR 1</b>	<b>YEAR 2</b>	<b>YEAR 3</b>	<b>YEAR 4</b>	<b>YEAR 5</b>
a) At least 80% of Uplift schools are rated as A or B, with no F schools	70%	72%	74%	76%	80%
b) At least 35% of limited-English proficient students meet expectations on STAAR/EOC (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness/End-of-Course exams) in math/Algebra I	30%	32%	33%	34%	35%
c) At least 35% of limited-English proficient students meet expectations on STAAR/EOC in reading/English	20%	25%	28%	32%	35%
d) At least 35% of Black students meet expectations on STAAR/EOC in math	20%	25%	28%	32%	35%
e) At least 35% of Black students meet expectations on STAAR/EOC in reading/English	33%	34%	34%	35%	35%
f) <10% of all enrolled students are failing 1+ classes	12%	11.5%	11%	10.5%	<10%

### (3) The project design is appropriate to the needs of the target population

Uplift will conduct a two-year student-level randomized control trial within 6 schools to measure the causal impact of the program. The schools that will participate are Uplift Heights Primary School, Uplift Heights Middle School, Uplift Hampton Primary School, Uplift Hampton Middle School, Uplift Mighty Primary School, and Uplift Mighty Middle School. These schools were chosen for two primary reasons: Student disciplinary incidents are highest in these schools, and the crime rates in the surrounding neighborhoods are higher than in other Uplift communities, necessitating additional interventions and supports for our students there.

Additional activities in the planning year and throughout EIR project rollout are detailed in the following evaluation table, which summarizes the project design by EIR funding year.

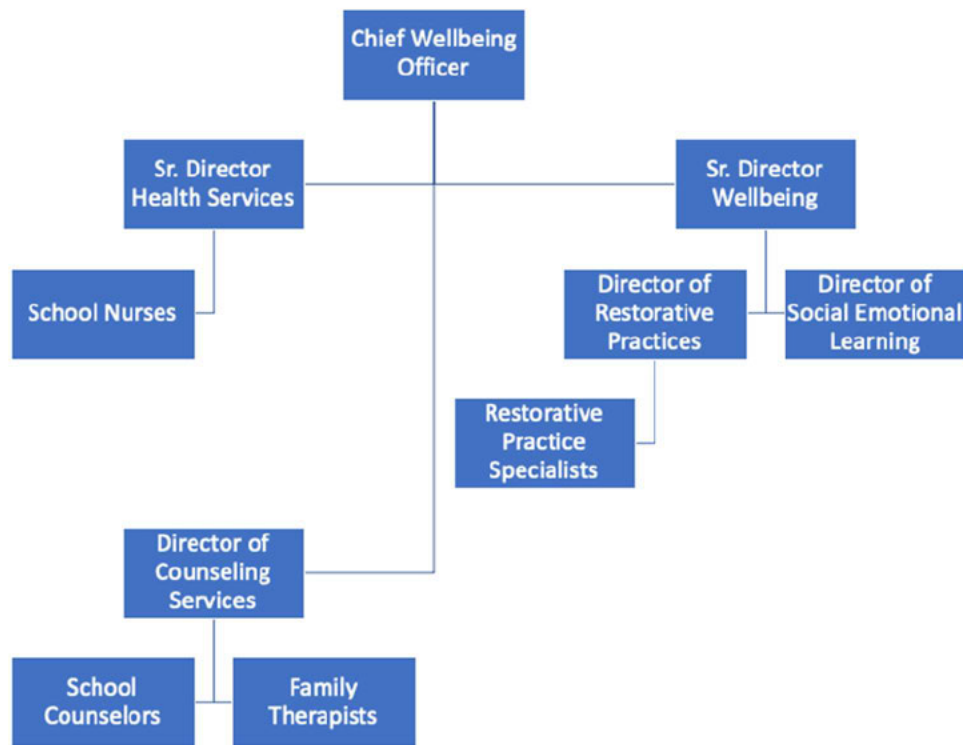
Grant Year/ Period	1: Jan 2022	2: SY2022-2023	3: SY2023- 2024	4: SY2024- 2025	5: SY2025- December 2026
Grant Activities	Onboarding; Project Planning; Hiring	Pilot Efforts	Two Year Study Period		Delayed Roll-Out
Implementation Evaluation	Meeting cadence and partnership expectations established; Interviews with program leaders; principals, etc. Assessment of "business as usual" and pilot efforts through qualitative and quantitative methods; Exploration of mediating factors; Recs for refining the intervention		Formal measurement of spillovers, contamination, and attrition; Implementation fidelity assessed		Recommendations for Scale-Up Activities
Impact Evaluation	Submission to the Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness (REES); Technical assistance monitoring begins	Thresholds for Implementation Fidelity Established	Randomization Occurs in 6 schools (3 Elementary; 3 Middle); Baseline and outcome conditions measured;		Cont'd Analysis; Submission to WWC; Conferences and Dissemination Activities; Cost Benefit and Sustainability Analysis

## C. Adequacy of Resources and High-Quality Management Plan

(1) The management plan will achieve project objectives on time and within budget including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks

Uplift Education has a dedicated and highly experienced team in place to successfully

manage *Path to Purpose* so that all project objectives are achieved on time and within budget. The organization chart at right provides context to Uplift’s investment in scholar wellbeing and our principled understanding of the interconnectedness of social emotional health, physical health, and mental health in achieving total wellbeing:



Please see **Appendix J-5** for a detailed, six-page **Project Action Plan** that supports implementation of *Path to Purpose* throughout the five-year EIR project period. The following table illustrates the key **project management** activities, responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for this EIR project that will ensure fidelity to the program Logic Model, adherence to program budget, and the timely accomplishment of all program goals and objectives. **Items will repeat annually throughout the grant with the exception of items marked with an asterisk (\*)** that are one- time activities. Following that is the timeline for data collection to measure

progress toward project objectives and outcomes. (Note: Timeline reflects the *grant project* quarters, ex: Q1 – Jan. - March, etc.)

Major Project Management Activities and Milestones	Position(s)	Timeline
Announce notice of EIR grant award to Uplift learning communities and project partners*	CEO	Q1
Designate Chief Well-Being Officer (CWBO) to serve as Project Director (PD) to be responsible for overall implementation, compliance, and reporting related to this EIR initiative*	CEO	Q1
Meet with stakeholders and independent evaluators, to review goals, objectives, activities, timelines, and budget	CWBO/PD	Q1 Ongoing as needed
Hire staff as noted in budget	CWBO/PD	Q1-Q2
Conduct grant kick-off call to begin implementation planning with executive team, business and finance offices, treatment school leaders, and other stakeholders as appropriate.	CWBO/PD; grant staff	Q1 each year; quarterly check-ins
<b>MILESTONE: Project Staffing Complete</b>		
Establish data gathering and reporting procedures, timelines, and methods; align with other existing Uplift grant initiatives and protocols	Project Evaluators (PE) and CWBO/PD	Q1 and Q3 each year
Update baseline demographics and other data	CWBO/PD; school staffs support	August each year
Consult with school teams and community and project partners/supporters to implement and actualize the project	CWBO/PD	Q1-Q4 each year
Conduct data gathering for project evaluation	CWBO/PD, PE; Business office to support	Quarterly
<b>MILESTONE: Project Systems, Baselines, and Targets Established</b>		
Manage program-related training each year in accordance with project timeline	CWBO/PD	Ongoing throughout project
Purchase/receive/store/distribute/install supplies, materials, and equipment to support project implementation	CWBO/PD; grant staff supports	Q1-Q4 each year
Complete annual interim financial and management reports; share with stakeholders via board meetings	CWBO/PD, CFO	Q2, Q4 or as required each year
Disseminate results of EIR project to US Dept. of Education, regional and local stakeholders, education/ business/community partners, and others	CWBO/PD, Business Office	Q4 or as required each year
<b>MILESTONE: Path to Purpose Program Complete; Targets Met</b>		

## (2) Qualifications, relevant training, and experience of key project personnel

Uplift Education is one of the most successful public charter school systems in Texas and the country as evidenced by its scholar success outcomes. Throughout its history, Uplift has modeled an entrepreneurial mindset and commitment to ongoing innovation that has enabled it to successfully develop and implement a broad array of projects and initiatives effectively and

efficiently. As such, we believe our talented team (see resumes, attached in **Appendix B**<sup>5</sup>) and system of change management—organized around a relentless commitment to high-quality work—position us well to fully execute this project. Bios of senior staff are below.

██████████ is the **Chief Executive Officer of Uplift Education**. ██████████ joined Uplift Education in 2009 after having been a consultant at McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm, for nine years. ██████████ brings her experience in helping clients develop and execute strategies and building organizational capacity to Uplift and has been critical to the growth of the organization. While at McKinsey, ██████████ served the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, the City of Dallas, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation

██████████, a veteran educator with a proven track record for leading successful schools, is the **President of Uplift Education**. Since joining Uplift eight years ago, ██████████ has held various positions including the campus director for Uplift Peak High School, managing director for Uplift’s High Schools and most recently Chief Academic Officer. In her role as President, ██████████ oversees Uplift’s Teaching and Learning and School Leadership Teams to create a coherent, aligned vision, goals, and strategies for Uplift’s campus instructional teams.

**To our knowledge, Uplift Education is currently the only public school system (traditional or charter) in the US to establish an Office of Well-Being and to elevate its head to the role of Chief.** ██████████ joined Uplift’s executive team as **Chief Well-Being Officer** in the fall of 2019. **Appendix J-6** details the impact he made in just his first year on staff. This addition to Uplift’s innovative and robust wellness and Student Support Services team

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to resumes for key project personnel named here, **Appendix B** includes resumes for key personnel included as in-kind match. See Budget Narrative for more detail.

has ensured that Uplift students have access to regular and reliable preventative and supportive mental health practices but will also build the necessary mental health and well-being practices for the adults who serve students each day. Prior to his work with Uplift, John served most recently as Special Advisor to the President, and previously Dean of the School of Education at the University of North Texas at Dallas. In his time at UNT Dallas, he founded the Emerging Teacher Institute, which is committed to transforming teacher and school leader preparation through competency-based education combined with innovative and rigorous clinical and social emotional learning. He will serve as the **Project Director** for *Path to Purpose* during the EIR funding period.

■■■■■ joined Uplift as our new **Senior Director of Well-Being and SEL/RP** in April 2020. In this role, she supervises design, growth and performance of staff and scholar well-being, social emotional learning, and restorative practices. In her previous work, ■■■■ has led workshops and presented her work in social emotional learning, trauma-informed program design, and the critical value of creativity and the arts both nationally and internationally. She most recently served on the leadership team of a national research project examining the impact of explicit SEL curriculum in both in-school and out-of-school time in seven US communities. Together with ■■■■, ■■■■ is infusing well-being practices into our redesigned new teacher trainings, conducting senior leadership retreats on well-being, revitalizing our breakroom spaces to become teacher wellbeing spaces, and launching an employee health campaign, “the Healthy Teacher.” We are excited to see the long-lasting impact this work will have both on scholar and staff social emotional health across our network for years to come. ■■■■ reports directly to ■■■■ and has been instrumental in planning for adult well-being.

**██████████, Senior Director of Well-Being and Health Services,** works collaboratively with the Chief Well-being and SEL Officer and other Senior Leaders to identify and deploy necessary supports and prescriptive elements for designated campuses and divisions; develops strategic, functional, and operational plans needed to implement systemic practices that will reduce staff-related stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and attrition and increase positive staff well-being, engagement, resilience, and retention; and oversees the development of department leadership.

**██████████ is Uplift's Director of Social-Emotional Learning.** In this role, █████ works to ensure high-quality social-emotional learning programming across Uplift's network. █████ responsibilities include selecting and implementing evidence-based programming district wide and leading SEL coaches who support teachers as they embed SEL into their daily practices. █████ has experience in SEL instruction through modeling, co-planning, coaching, and providing feedback to teachers and campus administrators for successful SEL implementation. █████ works to design and implement professional development that refines and expands understanding about research based SEL instruction.

**██████████, Managing Director of Curriculum and Instruction,** joined Uplift Education in June of 2020. He leads a team to ensure that Uplift provide engaging, rigorous, and culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy to scholars. █████ is skilled in Educational Technology, Instructional Design, Leadership, Data Analysis, and Statistics and has a strong education-field background.

**██████████, Director of Counseling and Prevention Services,** has served Uplift in this role since 2018 and was Manager of Counseling Services in the two years prior to that. She oversees PK-12 school-based mental health, family services, and prevention and wrap-around

services, including homeless and foster care services, substance use prevention, suicide prevention, dating violence prevention, and sexual harassment awareness and prevention. She also supervises 49 mental health clinicians and provides professional development opportunities for counselors, administrators, teachers, students, and parents related to social-emotional health

Uplift has successfully managed and executed large federal grants including the Department of Education Charter Expansion Grant and multiyear grants from national foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation. Uplift's finance and development teams are adept at managing grant budgets and submitting on time and factual update reports to our philanthropic partners.

**(3) Costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design, and potential significance**

*Path to Purpose* will focus treatment on students and adults at 6 schools (3 elementary, 3 middle) to measure the effects of the promising strategies (see page 4) before scaling up to additional schools. By Year 5 of the funding period, this \$4.4 million EIR project (request plus match) will have impacted an estimated 3,612 students and 22 school leaders, teachers, and staff (3,834 participants, total) for a per-participant cost of \$1,148.

**(4) Procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement**

Performance feedback and continuous improvement are integral to the design of *Path to Purpose* at the level of overall program implementation and efficacy and at the student/participant SEL skill acquisition and academic improvement levels as well. Uplift will create, pilots, tests, and refines the SEL and well-being interventions and what that might look like in the classroom with teachers and students:

At the CMO level, Uplift's Executive Team—composed of the CEO, President, Chief People Officer, Chief Well-Being Officer, Chief Operations Officer, Chief External Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Legal Officer—meets weekly to systematically assess Uplift's

needs, set rigorous organizational goals, and measure progress toward those goals with a focus on improving student achievement, college preparation, and success.

The weekly Executive Team meetings will also ensure oversight of *Path to Purpose* for the organization, alignment of the project to org-wide goals, and that project tasks are embedded into the existing daily operation and data monitoring activities of Uplift Education. In addition, the **Project Management Team (PMT)**, composed of the Chief Well-Being Officer (CWO)/Project Director, the Senior Director of Well-being and Health Services, the Senior Director of Well-Being and SEL/RP, the Director of Social Emotional Learning, the Director of Counseling Services, and one treatment school leader, will observe the following schedule of communication, coordination, and reporting:

- **Daily:** Project Director (PD) oversees all EIR activities, budget, and timeline.
- **Weekly:** PD meets with project staff to communicate project implementation updates, assess progress toward goals, identify what's working well, and address project implementation challenges and problem solve to address the challenge.
- **Monthly:** Beginning in year 2, PD conducts site visits to pilot schools to observe the early stages of project development and implementation and to seek out and support best practices; PD checks in with Copia, the EIR Project Evaluator, to ensure data collection and analysis is on track.
- **Quarterly:** PMT meets to reflect on progress towards goals, gather and analyze feedback on iterative plan, and strategize plans moving forward; PD reports EIR progress to Uplift Board.
- **Semi-annually:** PD and Uplift Data Team gathers stakeholder input (district and school leaders, college counselors, teachers, students, parents) to inform program development.

- **Annually:** Annual reflection of project staff on best practices for Randomized Control Trial implementation, as supported by Evaluator; PD, as supported by Evaluator, submits reports to USDE on progress toward goals and objectives and other information as required.

## D. High-Quality Project Evaluation

### (1) Evaluation methods will produce evidence that will meet WWC standards without reservations

An independent mixed-methods evaluation of *Path to Purpose* will be conducted by Copia Consulting LLC (see **Appendix J-6**), and **the study design and methods will meet WWC evidence standards *without reservations***. The evaluation will include an impact analysis, implementation analysis, and exploratory analysis. Impact Analysis: **There will be two confirmatory impact studies**. The confirmatory research question that guides **Study 1 (Academic Achievement)** is:

*What is the impact of the project on academic achievement—reading and math, after 2 program years?*

The research questions that guide **Study 2 (Student Behaviors)** are:

1. *What is the impact of the project on social emotional learning after two program years?*
2. *What is the impact of the project on student behavior after two program years?*

Exploratory research questions will test mediating factors such as teacher satisfaction and student engagement. Copia will test these questions using a student-level blocked randomized controlled trial (RCT) in 3 elementary schools and 3 middle schools to draw causal inferences about the effects of the project. For all confirmatory research questions, the analytic approach will be to regress outcome measures on a treatment/comparison indicator and relevant individual-level covariates. For example, for the two-year treatment effect on academic

achievement, we will estimate the following fixed-effects linear regression model for student  $i$  in random assignment block  $k$ :

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_i + X_i B_x + B_k \theta_k + e_i$$

Where  $Y_i$  is the outcome measure for student  $i$ ;  $B_0$  is the pooled within-block mean for control students, adjusted for pre-treatment covariates;  $T_i$  is a dichotomous indicator variable signaling whether the student received the treatment (1 for treatment, 0 for control);  $B_1$  is the parameter of interest, the precision weighted average treatment effect, i.e. the within-block mean difference between treatment and control students, adjusted for pre-treatment covariates,  $B_x$  is a vector of coefficients corresponding to pre-treatment covariates,  $X$  (FRL eligibility, ELL status, race, gender, prior achievement);  $\theta_k$  is a vector of  $k-1$  blocked fixed effects, accounting for differences between sites; and  $e_i$  is the residual term for student  $i$ .

Based on the following assumptions the study is powered to achieve a minimum detectable effect size (MDES) of .16 for the two-year impact on academic achievement as measured by Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) scores (Study 1) and SEL skills and student behaviors (Study 2). Each MDES assumes a Type I error of .05 at a power of 80% and is calculated using the appropriate fixed-effects model where assignment is at the student level (220 students per school, 110 T/110 C per school or, 660 students, 330 T/330 C per study cohort), with 40% of the variance in student outcomes explained by student covariates. Please see **Appendix J-7** for other assumptions and details pertaining to the power analysis.

Students will be randomly assigned within blocks (schools) to either the treatment or control group. Students in the treatment group will receive a high dose of Second Step SEL instruction as defined in this grant application, while students in the control group will participate in the business-as-usual curriculum. By randomly assigning students in each site, the treatment and

control groups are expected to be equivalent in both observed and unobserved characteristics, and to differ only in terms of their exposure to the new curricular approach. For RCTs, WWC does not require establishing baseline equivalence across conditions. However, baseline conditions will be collected to safeguard against a situation where there is unexpected attrition or selection bias among the participants. To handle contamination from treatment to control, several best practices will be followed: **1)** The spillover of information will be formally assessed and reported; **2)** Staff will be given strategies for complying with the RCT design; **3)** Crossovers/no-shows will be tracked closely; and **4)** Both the intent-to-treat and treatment-on-treated effects will be estimated (Arnold Foundation 2005).

See **Appendix J-7** for a detailed description of how contamination, spillover, and attrition will be monitored and managed. Though unexpected, weighting may be employed if differential attrition rates do not meet WWC standards (Hawkes & Plewis, 2006).

## **(2) Evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit assessment of progress**

**Implementation Analysis:** Copia will also conduct an implementation evaluation in the first two years to understand how the curriculum works in practice, interpret the efficacy of the intervention, provide feedback for program improvement, and identify features and conditions necessary for sustainability and replication. The aim will be to make data-driven recommendations for refining the intervention and identify significant mediating relationships between the intervention and the outcomes of interest. Methodologies will include interviews with organizational and project leaders and school leaders, as well as focus groups with teachers, students and parents. The information gathered will be compiled into formative reports designed to provide feedback and information regarding perceptions of the program interventions, effectiveness, potential barriers to success and implementation fidelity.

**Implementation Evaluation Framework:** Copia will create a tool to assess the extent to which the program meets five key dimensions used to measure implementation fidelity (Dane & Schneider, 1998; Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Reyes et al., 2012). They are: **1) Adherence**—whether the components of the intervention are being delivered as designed; **2) Duration**—the number, length or frequency of sessions implemented; **3) Quality of delivery**—the way the implementer delivers the program using the techniques, processes, or methods prescribed; **4) Participant responsiveness**—the extent to which participants are engaged by and involved in the activities and content of the program; and **5) Program differentiation**—whether critical features that distinguish the program from the comparison condition are present or absent during implementation.

Numerous data collection methods will be employed during the first two years of the project to inform program decision-making. Transcripts from interviews and focus groups will be coded according to a structure designed to provide comparative information among participating schools and identifying factors and themes contributing to any differences. Surveys will be analyzed using factor analyses and ANOVAs enabling analyses by subpopulation and identification of statistical differences among respondents. A correlational analysis will evaluate the outcomes of interest by subpopulation and other covariates to inform program improvements. The inclusion of two cohorts in two different time periods of a students' development (transition to middle school-- 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade -- and transition to high school — 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>) enables the research effort to understand how age and maturation interacts with the treatment. These results will be important in guiding later efforts to scale the intervention, as they may identify settings and populations for which the program is not well suited. The preceding table shows evaluation

activities at a glance by grant year. See **Appendix J-7** for additional details on data collection methods, partnership management, and reporting procedures.

### (3) Contribution to knowledge or understanding of educational problems/issues/strategies

**Valid and Reliable Research Measures:** The confirmatory outcome measures for the impact analysis on academic achievement are based on valid and reliable tests that Uplift routinely conducts, making data collection and management efficient. Additional data will be collected from Uplift’s data team including demographic data. The Copia researchers received verbal commitment from Uplift’s Chief Well-Being Officer that all tests would be administered as instructed by the researchers. Relying on routinely collected, valid and reliable measures reduces risks associated with gathering new data. In the instance that unique instruments are created for this program, reliability will be assessed using program data; all measures will meet WWC thresholds for face validity. Overall, the evaluation proposed here is structurally advantageous because it allows the researchers to explore three outcomes: academic outcomes, social emotional outcomes, and behavioral outcomes, contributing to our understanding of strategies that work for this project and target group. **Data collection and measurement plan** is below.

Variable Type	Indicators	Study: Grades	Data Source	Frequency	Existing
Outcome (Study 1: Academic Achievement)	Academic Achievement*	4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , and 7 <sup>th</sup> 8 <sup>th</sup> estimated separately	Reading and Math MAP Scores	BOY/EOY	Yes
Outcome (Study 2: SEL)	Non-Cognitive Skills*	4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , and 7 <sup>th</sup> 8 <sup>th</sup> estimated separately	Panorama Survey Scores (Examples: Self-Efficacy and Emotion Regulation)	BOY/EOY	Yes
Outcome (Study 2: Discipline)	Student Discipline	4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , and 7 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> estimated separately	HERO system for attendance and discipline tracking	Continuous	Yes
Mediator	Teacher Satisfaction	4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> estimated separately	Gallup 12 Engagement Survey	BOY/EOY	Yes
Mediator	Student Engagement	4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> estimated separately	Rhythm Pulse Survey	Weekly	Yes
*See <a href="#">SEL-Validity-Report.pages</a> ( <a href="#">panorama-www.s3.amazonaws.com</a> )					

**Mediator Analysis:** The mediator analysis will connect the implementation study with the impact study to shed light on the levers that Uplift has to influence outcomes. Multi-level mediation analyses described in Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher (2009) will be applied to test how various mediating factors (M) like changes in instructional practices mediates the relationship between the intervention (X) and the outcomes of interest (Y), namely students’ academic achievement on Reading and Math scores. In this instance, teacher satisfaction and student engagement will be tested as mediators to academic achievement. Overall, findings from this study will provide evidence for school leaders and researchers alike for developing social emotional support systems that change student outcomes. A high-level summary of the evaluation parameters is included below:

	Study 1: Academic Achievement	Study 2: Behavioral Outcomes
Intervention Components	See Logic Model, Appendix G	
Schools	3 Elementary; 3 Middle	
Grades	Cohort 1: 3rd and 4th and Cohort 2: 7th and 8th	
Treatment/Comparison	330 T/330 C per study cohort	
Confirmatory Outcome and Baseline Pre-Test	Cohort 1: 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade MAP Reading/Math scores; Cohort 2: 6th and 7 <sup>th</sup> grade MAP Reading/Math scores	
Statistical Analysis	Two level HLM (students nested in schools)	
Mediating Factors	Teacher Satisfaction as measured by Gallup/Student Engagement as measured by Rhithm Pulse	N/A
MDES Confirmatory	.16 per study cohort (Assumes Type I error of .05 at a power of 80 percent and is calculated using the appropriate two-level fixed effects model where assignment is at the individual level; See Appendix for further assumptions about the power analysis.)	
Note: Pilot schools used in Year 2 of the grant are distinct from the treatment/study schools used in Years 3-4.		

Copia will also be charged with a cost-benefit analysis providing guidance aimed at ensuring the most impactful interventions are sustainable and replicable one grant funding has ended. Estimated benefits will include potential revenue generated from increased attendance and reductions in disciplinary actions.