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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illinois State Board of Education • Congressman Eric Sorensen • Senator Richard Durbin • State Representative Patrick Windhorst • State Representative Aaron Ortiz • State Senator Celina Villanueva • State Senator Karina Villa • State Representative Theresa Mah • Chicago Public Schools • McLean County Unit District No. 5 • Herrin Community Unit District No. 4 • Youth Guidance • Illinois Collaboration on Youth • Polk Bros. Foundation • Brighton Park Neighborhood Council • Council for a Stronger America 		

I. A Note About the Applicant

Metropolitan Family Services (MFS) is a 501(c)(3) corporation organized in Illinois, acting in this application through Afterschool for Children and Teens Now (ACT Now), a subsidiary program housed at MFS. ACT Now is an unincorporated association with its own funding and governance structure, fiscally sponsored by MFS. A fiscal sponsor is a non-profit organization that provides fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative services to help build the capacity of charitable projects.¹ According to the National Council of Nonprofits, “using a fiscal sponsorship arrangement offers a way for a cause to attract donors even when it is not yet recognized as tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). In essence, the fiscal sponsor serves as the administrative ‘home’ of the cause. Charitable contributions are given to the fiscal sponsor, which then grants them to support the cause.”²

Given that ACT Now is a smaller organization, it utilizes this fiscal sponsorship to access certain services, enabling it to focus on its substantive work supporting youth development program providers. ACT Now pays MFS a fiscal sponsor fee of [REDACTED] of all incoming revenue in order to cover the following services: accounting, audits, liability insurance, employment liability insurance, property and casualty insurance, workers’ compensation insurance, unemployment claims, use of the printers and copiers, scanning, fax, postage, full use of conference rooms and common areas, payroll and benefits, senior management oversight, office furniture, human resources administration, and information technology (IT) infrastructure. MFS is also able to provide ACT Now with in-house support in key areas, including grant management, communications, graphic design, email software, web development, fund development, and event planning. MFS also has offices throughout the Chicagoland area and has

provided ACT Now space for trainings on multiple occasions. As the full cost of paying for all these services as a separate organization is far more than the fee ACT Now pays, this arrangement results in a more efficient use of funds than would otherwise be possible.

This application is written through the perspective of ACT Now as the statewide expert in afterschool programs and community schools in Illinois.

II. Need for Project

Youth and families in Illinois face daily obstacles in accessing comprehensive opportunities and achieving student success. Traditional public schools and afterschool programs do not have the capacity to fully meet the needs of youth, especially given the increased need for supports following the COVID-19 pandemic. To identify needs of youth and communities across the state, academic, social-emotional (SE), and physical well-being were assessed using the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Illinois Report Card, Kids Count data (collected by the Annie E. Casey Foundation), and the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP). Reference to the Afterschool for Children and Teens Now (ACT Now) Community Schools Report is also included to account for the benefits of the community schools model, as well as the opportunity for expansion of this model across Illinois.

The proposed project will serve school districts in both urban and rural areas of the state. In this application, we are including partnerships with the Chicago Public Schools District 299 (CPS), Herrin Community Unit School District 4 (CUSD4), and McLean County Unit School District 5 (USD5); however, we also plan to identify five additional districts throughout the state at the beginning of the grant period.

Statewide assessment data shows that students in Illinois consistently perform below expected performance levels. A contributing factor to this could be the lack of preparation

students receive in their transition to becoming full-time students. In fall 2019, KIDS data showed that only 29 percent of students across the state were ready for kindergarten as assessed across three developmental areas.³ The Erikson Institute's Risk and Reach report released similar results, indicating that 74 percent of students in the state were *not ready* for kindergarten; in Cook County, where CPS is located, 77 percent were not ready, and in Williamson and McClean Counties, where CUSD4 and USD5 are located, that number was 78 and 68 percent, respectively.⁴

On a statewide level, Illinois has demonstrated immense learning loss following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collected by ISBE's Illinois Report Card showed that school-age students' academic attainment decreased by five percent in English Language Arts (ELA) and 6 percent in Mathematics (math) in 2022 as compared to 2019. Further, high school students' performance decreased by seven percent in ELA and five percent in math in 2022 as compared to 2019. Results of the 2022 Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR), taken annually by school-age students, reported that 23 percent of students in Illinois did not meet performance expectations in ELA, while only 26 percent met performance expectations.⁵ Similarly, 22 percent of students did not meet math expectations, while 22 percent of students tested meeting performance standards. Finally, student scores on the Illinois Science Assessment (ISA) presented similar results to that of the IAR, demonstrating that only 51 percent of students in the state who took the assessment performed well enough to meet educational standards in science.⁶

Education rates in Illinois fare worse than the national average. Fourth-grade academic proficiency is a crucial marker of educational development. At the fourth-grade level, students are using their reading skills as a critical component of learning other subjects, making reading proficiency crucial in their ability to keep up academically. Children who reach the fourth grade

without having proficient reading skills are more likely to drop out of high school, reducing their potential opportunities in the workforce.⁷ In 2019, 34 percent of fourth graders in Illinois scored at a proficient reading level. This was in line with the national average, however, this overall low level of performance translated into lower-than-average scores in math and science. In 2019, Illinois fourth graders presented an average math score of 237, three points lower than the national average. Further, only 38 percent of students performed at a proficient level, a decrease from 2017 results. The average science score in 2015 for fourth graders in Illinois (151) was also lower than the national average (153) and demonstrated a smaller rate of proficient students (35 percent) than the nation (38 percent).⁸

The statewide results, as mentioned above, are also reflected on an individual basis in the school districts proposed for this project. The Chicago Public Schools District 299 (CPS) is the largest school district in the state of Illinois, totaling 626 schools in the city of Chicago. Statewide assessment scores show that these schools lack the resources needed to adequately support the academic success of students. 2022 IAR results for ELA reflected that 33 percent of students tested in the “did not meet expectations” category—nine percent more than the state average. Similarly, 33 percent of students did not meet expectations in math, an increase of 11 percent in comparison to state results. In 2023, 67 percent of students tested at a level indicating they are “not proficient” in science education. Finally, only 33 percent of students tested at a level that met state science standards—17 percent less than the state average.

Furthermore, CPS students also performed at a lesser level than they had pre-pandemic⁹ - ELA performance worsened by eight percent, and math performance worsened by nine percent. Following a similar pattern, science performance decreased significantly—students scoring at a proficient level in science decreased by five percent following the onset of the pandemic.¹⁰

Herrin Community Unit School District 4 (CUSD4) also experienced a reduction in academic performance compared to pre-pandemic data. 2022 IAR results demonstrate that the number of students who did not meet testing standards increased by eight percent in ELA and four percent in math, while proficiency decreased by nine percent in ELA and six percent in math. 2022 ISA results likewise reflect that 66 percent of CUSD4 students were not proficient in science standards, a one percent increase from 2019.¹¹

Similarly, McLean County Unit School District 5 (USD5) presented reduced academic results in 2022 compared to pre-pandemic data. 2022 IAR results showed that the number of students performing below performance expectations worsened by seven percent for ELA and five percent for math. Additionally, the number of students meeting expectations decreased by nine percent in ELA and seven percent in math. 2022 ISA results presented that 39 percent of USD5 students were not proficient in science standards. While this number has improved compared to 48 percent in 2021, there remains an increase of one percent from 2019.¹²

Academic performance results also indicate disparity among youth from the same school with differing ethnic and racial backgrounds. Statewide, academic performance of White youth greatly surpasses that of students of color (i.e., Black and Hispanic students) in all tested subjects. This trend was demonstrated to continue through high school. On average, statewide, 19 percent of White students performed better than students of color on the IAR and ISA. Similarly, 28 percent of White high school students performed more proficiently on the SAT than Black and Hispanic students.¹³

In addition to these academic deficits faced by the students in target districts, many students also demonstrate risky academic behaviors.

Suspensions: During the 2021-2022 school year, ISBE reported a total of 184,365 incidents of in-school and out-of-school suspensions. CPS accounted for 15,985 incidents, CUSD4 accounted for 178 incidents, and USD5 accounted for 3,059 incidents.¹⁴

Chronic absenteeism: Overall, in the state, chronic absenteeism has increased by 12 percent compared to pre-pandemic levels. CPS reported a chronic absenteeism rate of 45 percent for the 2021-2022 school year, and both CUSD4 and USD5 reported a rate of 25 percent. In all named school districts, and statewide, Black students reported the highest rate of absenteeism, followed by Hispanic students, and White students.

Chronic truancy: The rate of chronic truancy statewide was 22 percent in Illinois for the 2021-2022 school year. Rates in CPS, CUSD4, and USD5 surpass the state average, reporting 52 percent, 25 percent, and 26 percent, respectively. In all named school districts, and statewide, Black students reported the highest rate of truancy, followed by Hispanic students, and White students.

Youth in Illinois have also shown a great need for mental health and social-emotional interventions following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though this need has always been prevalent, it has been exacerbated by a lack of social interaction, a decrease in academic attainment, and looming fear of disease. Data from the Kids Count Data Center presents that, in 2019, 24 percent of children in Illinois “ha[d] one or more emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions.”¹⁵ Further, reports of adults living in households with children who felt down, depressed, or hopeless for more than eight days in a two-week period increased by five percent between September 2021 and July 2022.¹⁶

The Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership’s (ICMHP) FY21 Annual Report to the Governor clearly demonstrates the heightened need for mental health interventions in the state

over the past several years. Since 2015, the overall state rank for youth mental health has dropped by 17 places, leaving Illinois at rank 36 in 2021. Also, since 2015, youth who have reported at least one major depressive episode in a reporting year has increased from nine percent to 15 percent in 2021. Finally, youth with a major depressive episode within the reporting year who did not receive treatment increased from 56 percent in 2020 to 62 percent in 2021. Much of this can be attributed to a lack of accessibility to treatment—18 percent of parents in Chicago reported that they “could not access the services they wanted for their child.”¹⁷

Youth in Illinois are also experiencing physical health hardships and engaging in risky behaviors that may lead to adverse outcomes. Poor health in childhood leads to negative results in school readiness and lasting difficulties for future health. The Kids Count Data Center placed Illinois’ health ranking at 23 in 2022, which is a drop of 13 ranks since 2017.¹⁸ State rankings depend on a variety of health factors, including youth exposure to violence, family stress, inadequate housing, lack of preventive healthcare, poverty, and substance abuse.¹⁹ Many youth in the state do not have access to preventive medical and dental care, one of the major factors in the health ranking. Between 2020 and 2021, 39 percent of children in the state did not receive medical care and dental care. In addition, 19 percent of youth did not visit a health care professional for illness, wellness checks, or physical examinations.²⁰ A figure exacerbating this issue is the number of youth lacking health insurance in the state. Fourteen percent of adults in the state reported living in households with children who lack health insurance as of July 2022.²¹ Children without health insurance coverage are less likely to receive care when they need it due to the potential financial burden of visiting healthcare professionals.

Not having healthcare coverage or regularly engaging with healthcare providers can create hesitancy to receive healthcare even when services are offered and made more accessible

and affordable. This is demonstrated through youth vaccination rates for Coronavirus (COVID-19). In Illinois overall, only 50 percent of youth have been fully vaccinated and 56 percent have received one dose of the vaccine. A similar trend is found in all target communities—73 percent of youth in Chicago have been fully vaccinated, 30 percent of youth in Williamson County have been fully vaccinated, and 58 percent of youth in McLean County have been fully vaccinated.²² Vaccines for the Coronavirus have been provided to families for free across the state, and made accessible through home visits, complimentary transportation, vaccination clinics at schools and community buildings, etc., yet despite a two year long vaccination rollout, almost half of the youth in the state are still not fully vaccinated. Families need opportunities for consistent and sustained healthcare to feel secure in allowing their children to receive care.

A second factor used in the state health rankings is youth involvement in substance use. Illinois youth are highly involved in substance and tobacco use. In 2019, 39 percent of youth aged 12 to 25 reported binge alcohol drinking in Illinois.²³ Furthermore, eight percent of 12- to 25-year-olds in Illinois reported illicit drug use other than marijuana in 2019, and 18 percent reported cigarette use.²⁴ These statistics indicate a lack of preventive resources and opportunities for youth in Illinois.

The need for intervention services for youth is mirrored by their families and communities, and an integral part of the success of community schools is family and community engagement. Adults in communities within the targeted areas face risk factors similar to those faced by their youth, including living in poverty, living without health insurance, and insecure housing status. In Illinois overall, there is a poverty rate of 12 percent, almost matching the national average of 13 percent. Cook, Williamson, and McLean counties all report similar levels at 14, 15, and 14 percent, respectively. Further, while statewide unemployment rates amount to

six percent, unemployment percentages in the target counties have reached seven in Cook County, six in Williamson County, and seven in McLean County as of 2021.²⁵ In Illinois, the median household income in 2021 was \$72,215; the median household incomes for each school district's counties were as follows: \$72,063 in Cook County, \$55,447 in Williamson County, and \$71,309 in McLean County.²⁶ Youth living in poverty elevates their risk of experiencing behavioral, social-emotional, and health challenges. Child poverty also reduces skill-building opportunities and academic outcomes, including students' capacity to learn and to graduate high school. In 2021, 16 percent of youth in Illinois were reported as living in poverty.²⁷

Poverty and unemployment metrics inform data collected pertaining to various risk factors, such as higher rates of crime and violence, unstable homes, food insecurity, and poorer health.²⁸ Reports by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness presented that over 10,000 people in Illinois were experiencing homelessness as of January 2020. Of those individuals, 1,063 were family households and 671 were aged between 18 and 24. Public school data from the United States Department of Education (DOE) showed an estimated 36,898 students experienced homelessness in Illinois over the course of the 2020-2021 school year.²⁹ In addition, food insecurity in Illinois remains a concern, with 20 percent of households with children in Illinois receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits between 2017 and 2021.³⁰ These statistics further illustrate Illinois' health ranking status, as the Annie E. Casey Foundation identified inadequate housing and food insecurity as factors in indicating health outcomes. An additional risk factor includes adult access to health coverage.³¹ The 2020 Census found that seven percent of adults in Illinois do not have health coverage. Additionally, 12 percent of parents do not have access to healthcare coverage.³²

Community schools are a key strategy in working towards increasing accessibility and equity as partnerships serve to address systemic barriers that limit opportunities for children and families. The community schools model provides additional support by leveraging community resources to meet the full needs of students so they can focus on learning. Community schools serve to close educational attainment gaps as they provide access to expanded and enriched learning time opportunities. In Illinois, community schools have shown: (a) improved grades; (b) greater student interest in school; (c) improved attendance; (d) a greater feeling of preparation for college and career; (e) improved academic performance; (f) increased graduation rates; and (g) improved standardized test scores.³³ In addition to academic gains, community schools have also proven to increase youth social-emotional (SE) skills and behaviors. The integrated supports built into the community schools model provide students with opportunities to engage with trusted adults and learn to manage their emotions. ACT Now's Community Schools Report shares the following SE outcomes of community schools in Illinois: (a) an average of 82 percent of students have learned ways to take care of themselves when upset; (b) about 82 percent of students have developed skills for healthy conflict resolution; and (c) 68 percent of students have shown improved behavior. Furthermore, community schools that have offered mental health services within the model have reported major gains in student mental health. For example, "WeGo Together for Kids in West Chicago found that 71 percent of clients who received mental health services met at least one treatment goal."³⁴

ACT Now has worked to champion the community schools model across the state of Illinois for several years through advocacy efforts and professional development offerings. On a quarterly basis, ACT Now holds community schools meetings for community schools providers Downstate, in the Chicago Suburbs, and in Chicago. These meetings hold time for professional

development, policy updates on the local, state, and federal levels, offer Q&A with experts, and provide opportunities to network with community schools professionals in similar areas of the state. Previous training topics have included: family engagement, advisory boards, trauma-informed practices, bullying and resolving student conflict through restorative practices, and grant writing. ACT Now has also been heavily involved in the advocacy for expanding funding opportunities for community schools. As a coalition, ACT Now has advocated for statewide funding supporting the establishment of community schools in Illinois and has worked to include community schools as a line item in the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) budget. We have worked with ISBE to establish a sustainable statewide funding stream for community schools through the Community Partnerships grant. This grant can be used to supplant federal funding past the five-year grant term.

Currently, funding for community schools in Illinois is disjointed, pulling from numerous different funding sources which were not created to support the community schools model. Many of the federal and state funding sources leveraged by community schools, such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), and Teen Responsibility, Education, Achievement, Caring, and Hope (Teen REACH), are awarded for a limited number of years, forcing community schools to constantly compete with a larger pool of afterschool providers for funding. These funding opportunities are also extremely limited—in 2014, ISBE received 142 applications for 21st CCLC requesting a total of [REDACTED], but only had capacity to award grants to 87 applicants for a total of [REDACTED].³⁵ Community schools leveraging this type of funding are continually put at risk of losing funding due to the large number of competitors.

Funding streams, such as 21st CCLC, do not collect or provide data pertinent to all aspects of the community schools model. Reporting requirements often do not incorporate data

on all four pillars of the model, and therefore, there is not enough quantitative support for the expansion of this work in the state. Implementing the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) state scaling grant in Illinois will allow for the first opportunity to collect data from a large cohort across the state, working with a coordinated approach and centralized training and evaluation, to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the community schools model. ACT Now can leverage this data in advocacy efforts for a statewide expansion of community schools in Illinois, providing support to emerging and already established institutions using this model. The FSCS state scaling grant will set precedent in the state for the efficacy of this strategy to provide holistic support for youth.

As established above, students in Illinois have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past several years. Youth need wrap-around services that will serve the whole child and their communities. ACT Now's Community Schools Report demonstrates that community schools have shown to be an extremely effective strategy in solving many of the previously mentioned academic, SE, and mental health difficulties faced by youth. Utilizing the FSCS state scaling grant to further expand the use of the pillars of the community schools model will be crucial in effectively addressing the growing needs of youth during this ongoing public health crisis and ensure that students are able to learn and grow.

III. Quality of the Project Design

A.1 The extent to which the design of the proposed project reflects relevant and evidence-based findings from existing literature...

Our plan uses data and evidence-based findings to address all aspects required by the U.S. Department of Education for Absolute Priority 5. Below we described the data that show the need for this programming and that the community school model is well-suited to address these needs. Each of our objectives outlined below describes the research base that support that

objective. This ensures that the associated activities will lead us to our overall goals that children are, (i) prepared for kindergarten, (ii) achieving academically, and (iii) safe, healthy, and supported by engaged adult family members.

1. A comprehensive plan that includes descriptions of the following:
a. The student, family, and school community to be served, including demographic information

ACT Now will implement this project in communities across Illinois. We will partner with the City of Chicago Public Schools District 299 (CPS), the McLean County Unit School District 5 (USD5), and Herrin Community Unit School District 4 (CUSD4), as these districts have demonstrated a high need for services and intervention and a commitment to the collaboration required. During the first six months of this grant, the statewide Steering Committee will identify five additional partner districts, based on relevant data, that will in turn select two schools to implement the community schools model.

Illinois is a diverse state with learners from a variety of backgrounds: 46 percent White, 17 percent Black, 27 percent Hispanic, five percent Asian, 0.4 percent other. In determining districts to partner with, ACT Now selected districts that have a range of diverse populations—CPS serves a student population that is 11 percent White, 36 percent Black, 47 percent Hispanic, and four percent Asian; CUSD4’s student population is 82 percent White, five percent Black, and 0.6 percent Asian; and USD5’s student population is 60 percent White, 15 percent Black, nine percent Hispanic, and nine percent Asian.³⁶

Students in these districts report demographic indicators, such as income level and English language learners, that suggest intervention strategies are needed. For reference, 47 percent of students in Illinois are identified as “low-income.” At CPS, 77 percent of students are low-income, at CUSD4, 56 percent of students, and at USD5, 33 percent of students. Many

students in the state and in these districts are English language learners (ELL), defined as students whose primary language is not English and who receive English language instruction. The following number of students identify as ELL: 14 percent in Illinois, 0.7 percent at CUSD4, and 22 percent in CPS, six percent in USD5.³⁷

b. A needs assessment that identifies the academic, physical, nonacademic, health, mental health, and other needs of students, families, and community residents.

Students in Illinois and in the identified districts also demonstrate opportunities for academic growth and the need for physical and mental health services. The following needs assessment includes evidence-based findings from literature and high-quality data sources used to measure those needs.

The Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) is a standardized assessment of academic readiness taken by elementary-age students on an annual basis beginning in third grade. The assessment tests students in two subjects, English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics (math), and ranks student achievement as follows: *Exceeded, Met, Approached, Partially Met, and Did Not Meet*. Data from these assessments in 2022 shows that students in Illinois and the chosen districts are performing at low levels in both subjects. Additionally, these academic performance measures demonstrate a decrease in students meeting expectations since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. For detailed data regarding statewide and district-specific IAR data, please see the *Need for Project* section.

Inadequate performance in earlier grades translates to poor results in high school. The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is the standardized assessment of college and career readiness taken in 11th grade. This assessment tests the same subjects as the IAR (ELA and Mathematics), and scores in the following categories: *Partially meets, Approaching, Meets, and Exceeds*.

Partially meets indicates students who demonstrate a minimal understanding relative to the Illinois Learning Standards while *meets standards* indicates students have met the proficiency level. In 2022 for the SAT, 32 percent of students partially met ELA standards and 47 percent of students partially met math standards in Illinois. Only 20 percent of students met standards in ELA and 23 percent of students met standards in math. Like the IAR, students at CPS scored worse than the state average (SA) in both subjects—40 percent and 55 percent of students partially met standards in ELA and math, respectively. CUSD4 students scored better than the SA in ELA as 27 percent of students partially met expectations. However, they underperformed in math with 51 percent of students partially meeting expectations. USD5 was the only district named in this project to demonstrate results better than the SA in both subjects: 21 percent of students partially met ELA standards and 41 percent of students partially met math standards.

Data collected by ISBE’s Illinois Report Card shows high variation in the performance outcomes for youth by race and ethnicity. White students performed at a higher achievement level than Black and Hispanic students regardless of age group or subject matter. In 2022, 34 percent and 30 percent of White students in Illinois met performance standards in ELA and math on the IAR while 44 percent of White students tested *proficient* on the Illinois Science Assessment (ISA). However, only 12 percent of Black students and 17 percent of Hispanic students met IAR performance expectations in ELA, 6 percent of Black students and 12 percent of Hispanic students met IAR performance expectations in math, and 21 percent of Black students and 32 percent of Hispanic students demonstrated proficiency on the ISA.³⁸ This disparity continues through high school. 2022 SAT results show that, on average in both subjects, 60 percent of White students did not meet performance expectations while 91 percent of Black students and 84 percent of Hispanic students did not meet expectations.

Each named school district demonstrates similar performance discrepancies. At CPS, 55 percent of White students, 92 percent of Black students, and 86 percent of Hispanic students scored below the readiness standards on the IAR.³⁹ CPS high schoolers demonstrated an even larger learning gap—40 percent of White students, 92 percent of Black students, and 84 percent of Hispanic students did not meet performance standards on the SAT. CUSD4 displayed similar trends: 66 percent of White students, 94 percent of Black students, and 80 percent of Hispanic students did not meet readiness measurements on the IAR.⁴⁰ At USD5, 67 percent of White students, 92 percent of Black students, and 86 percent of Hispanic students scored outside of the readiness standards for the IAR. On the SAT in USD5, 62 percent of White students, 93 percent of Black students, and 86 percent of Hispanic students did not meet expectations.

Students in the target areas also exhibit poor academic behavior. The districts all showed high levels of chronic truancy, disciplinary action, and chronic absenteeism. For a full accounting of this data, please see the *Need for Project* section.

One contributing factor to absenteeism and truancy is the school climate. The statewide annual school climate survey in Illinois is the 5Essentials Survey which measures schools on five aspects: Effective School Leaders, Supportive Environment, Collaborative Teachers, Ambitious Instruction, and Involved Families. Based on their results, schools are designated as “well-organized,” “organized,” “partially organized,” or “not organized” for school improvement. Research has shown that “schools strong on at least three of the Five Essentials for School Success are 10 times more likely to improve student learning than schools weak on three or more of the five essentials.”⁴¹

The Involved Families measure is composed of Parent Involvement in School, Parent-Teacher Trust, and Parent Influence on Decision Making in School. The Collaborative Teachers

measure includes Quality Professional Development, Teacher-Teacher Trust, Collective Responsibility, School Commitment, and Collaborative Practices. Both measures show room for improvement in schools from the selected districts; these are aspects the community schools strategy can impact.

Youth in Illinois are experiencing health hardships and engaging in risky behaviors that may lead to adverse outcomes. Poor health in childhood leads to negative results in school readiness and lasting difficulties for future health. Additionally, Illinois youth are highly involved in substance and tobacco use. Students across the state have also shown an increased need for mental health supports. For thorough data on the mental and physical health needs of students in Illinois and the target districts, please see the *Need for Project* section.

The need for intervention services for youth is mirrored by their families and communities. Poverty and unemployment metrics inform data collected pertaining to various risk factors, such as higher rates of crime and violence, unstable homes, and poorer health. For additional data related to families and communities in Illinois and the target districts, please see the *Need for Project* section.

The pillars of the community schools model foster a holistic approach to youth well-being, which includes providing services for the well-being of families and communities. Implementation of the community schools model in Illinois will offer sustained support where youth are at risk of falling behind socially, academically, and in their physical health.

- c. Annual measurable performance objectives and outcomes, including the use of appropriate evaluation methods to ensure successful achievement of project objectives, and including an increase in the number and percentage of families and students targeted for services each year of the program.**

ACT Now reviewed relevant research on community schools and youth development when selecting our objectives for this project. Each objective is supported by research to ensure

that the evidence-based activities and supports will lead to our outcomes. Our annual measurable performance objectives are designed to meet the broad goals of ensuring that children are (i) prepared for kindergarten, (ii) achieving academically, and (iii) safe, healthy, and supported by engaged adult family members. We use the term “adult family members” instead of “parents” to be inclusive of all the adults that have caregiving roles in children’s lives.

Objective 1: In participating school communities, ensure that at least 50 percent of children are ready for kindergarten, as indicated by Illinois KIDS data and the Erikson Institute’s Risk and Reach Report. Once a baseline is established, we expect to grow 10 percent in each year of the grant (e.g., if the baseline is 30 percent, year 1 goal will be 33 percent). We will accomplish this through referrals to early childhood education programs and supports such as the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). Participation in high-quality early childhood programs significantly impacts students’ readiness for kindergarten, as well as their trajectory in school and work. Research finds that children that participate in early education programs are more likely to successfully develop skills related to math or language.⁴²

Objective 2a: In schools served under the grant, increase academic achievement such that 50 percent of students meet or exceed their English Language Arts (ELA) achievement rates by the end of the five-year term as measured by the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). Once a baseline is established, we expect to grow ten percent from the established baseline annually.

Objective 2b: In schools served under the grant, increase academic achievement such that 50 percent of students meet or exceed their math achievement rates by the end of the five-year term as measured by the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). Once a baseline is established, we expect to grow ten percent from the established baseline annually.

Objective 3a: In schools served under the grant, increase academic achievement such that 50 percent of students meet or exceed their target growth rate in English Language Arts (ELA) by the end of the five-year term as measured by the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). Once a baseline is established, we expect to grow ten percent from the established baseline annually.

Objective 3b: In schools served under the grant, increase academic achievement such that 50 percent of students meet or exceed their target growth rate in math by the end of the five-year term as measured by the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). Once a baseline is established, we expect to grow ten percent from the established baseline annually. For Objectives 2a through 3b, activities will include tutoring, high-quality out-of-school time programs, and community and family supports. Community schools and their high-quality afterschool programs help students attain greater interest in school and completion of homework, improved attendance and grades, and increased rates of high school graduation.⁴³

Objective 4: In schools served under the grant, decrease chronic truancy and chronic absenteeism by at least ten percent, as indicated from data provided by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Once a baseline is established, decrease chronic truancy and chronic absenteeism by two percent of the baseline annually. Research has shown that chronic absenteeism can impact a student's academic achievement, social-emotional development, and disciplinary actions.^{44, 45} Effective prevention strategies include improving the overall school climate by building trusting relationships with students and their families, and closely monitoring attendance data of students throughout the school year.⁴⁶ Activities to achieve this objective will also include targeted communication, clarity of roles within the school, and data collection on reasons for absences.

Objective 5: In schools served under the grant, increase positive results on the 5Essentials survey, especially around family involvement, leading to all schools in the grant being rated as “organized” or “well-organized” by the end of the five-year term. Once a baseline is established, increase the parent response rate to the 5Essentials survey by three percent of the baseline annually. An improved school climate, as indicated by the results of the 5Essentials survey, will lead to academic improvements, more involved families, and collaborative leadership.⁴⁷

Objective 6: As the collaborative entity for community schools in Illinois, develop a support hub for full-service community schools to train resource coordinators and provide technical assistance and support for full-service community schools across the state. Research has shown that community schools are more effective when evidence-based strategies are followed with fidelity.⁴⁸ All community school coordinators in schools served under this grant will attend at least 25 hours of ACT Now training annually. As a result of participation in training, and based on surveys and qualitative data, at least 90 percent of community school coordinators working in schools under this grant will feel confident implementing the full-service community schools model. Once a baseline is established, increase the percentage of community school coordinators indicating confidence in implementation by ten percent of the baseline annually. Anticipated outcomes include building relationships with students, family, school staff and partners, developing and maintaining effective advisory boards, building and sustaining meaningful partnerships with community organizations, and aligning with the Community Schools Standards and the Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards.^{49, 50}

Objective 7: ACT Now will develop a statewide Steering Committee for community schools with participation from at least ten stakeholder groups in each year of the grant. The

Steering Committee will contain work groups to focus on aspects such as evaluation, implementation, health and wellness, family engagement, etc.

A.2 ...a high quality plan for project implementation integrating the four pillars of full-service community schools.

ACT Now has five years of experience in assisting schools with implementing the four pillars of the community schools model. Our resources, trainings, infrastructure, and existing partners position us as a hub for those who want to grow into community schools work and will allow us to implement the four pillars at Illinois community schools.

- 1. A description of the pillars of full-service community schools that they have in place or how they will establish these pillars, or how they will implement these pillars with partners, including community-based organizations, and collaborating with school leadership and staff.**

Integrated Student Supports

Integrated student supports (ISS) “address out-of-school barriers to learning through partnerships with social and health service agencies and providers, ideally coordinated by a dedicated professional staff member.”⁵¹ These include services provided by school staff, such as counselors and nurses, those offered by partners that come into the schools, such as health centers, mentoring, and counseling programs, as well as programs that utilize Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and positive youth development practices. ISS can also include training for teachers and program staff on topics such as restorative practices and trauma-informed care, to counteract the impact of exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and to help reduce conflict and disciplinary actions in schools.⁵²

Through ongoing communication with practitioners in the field, ACT Now shares the resources available through ISBE, such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Support Hubs (Hubs). These seven Hubs, “housed within six Regional Offices of Education across the state and

Chicago Public Schools are providing professional development, training, and support to districts in their region to establish and expand [trauma-informed] SEL programs in Illinois' schools.”⁵³

ACT Now assists districts in connecting with community partners based on individual needs, such as social services, health agencies, and organizations offering professional development on trauma-informed services. These partners can support physical and mental health, housing, citizenship, justice system involvement, food insecurity, and other needs that children and families may have.

Schools to be served by the grant also have resources in place, which may include school nurses, counselors, and social workers, as well as existing partnerships with local organizations, offering the services listed in the above paragraph.

There are a variety of violence prevention programs in Illinois. The Comprehensive Community Based Youth Services (CCBYS) program, run by the Illinois Collaboration on Youth (ICOY), an ACT Now partner, serves youth ages 11 to 17 at risk of involvement in the child welfare system or the juvenile justice system with an overarching goal of reunification and stabilization. The Restore, Reinvest, Renew Program (R3) funds grants for violence prevention, reentry, youth development, economic development, and civil legal aid services in areas suffering from violence bolstered by concentrated disinvestment. The Reimagine Public Safety Act (RPSA) invests ██████████ in evidence-based approaches to violence prevention, including youth development. ACT Now receives funding through the RPSA to provide technical assistance for grantees for youth-centered services. The grant has allowed an expansion of youth development trainings that ACT Now offers, including new trainings on LGBTQIA+ youth inclusion, cultural responsiveness in programs, and Peace Circles—a recognized strategy in preventing conflict among youth.

With additional funding from the Full-Service Community Schools state scaling grant, we propose to strengthen and deepen all the above supports. First, we will develop and implement workshops for districts statewide on assessing needs and finding community partners that are the best possible fit.

We will create a statewide repository for community resources, offering a broader range of community partners for schools, districts, and community schools practitioners. We will connect districts identified for this project with community partners from our network to meet their specified needs. Illinois' community schools will also continue to support high-impact programs that work to prevent juvenile crime and decrease risky behavior.

As schools develop their full-service community schools work and build connections with community partners, school and partner staff will be able to connect children and families more effectively to services to meet the needs of the whole child. These include physical health, e.g., vaccinations, screenings, and other health care needs; nutrition education and services such as meals before, during, and after school and access to food pantries; housing and transportation assistance; mental health services and supports; and early childhood programs. Where needed, mental health services and social-emotional learning will be brought into, or increased at, the schools served by this grant. Needs assessments will help to identify the types of supports that are most important, and partnerships will be leveraged to provide those services and supports.

Expanded and Enriched Learning Time (ELT)

Expanded and Enriched Learning Time means leveraging the time outside of the normal school day for additional opportunities for student academic, physical, mental, and social success. The ACT Now Afterschool Map and Database assists districts in finding community partners.⁵⁴ This interactive map allows for access to information on more than 2,500 out-of-

school time (OST) programs across the state. All schools, districts, and programs have free access to the database. This past year, the Map and Database underwent an update to include overlays with the following data and indicators: poverty, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, housing, and employment. These new overlays allow those using the Map to target under-resourced areas and help community partners to find the areas of greatest need.

Through the Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards (Standards), ACT Now supports districts and schools in identifying high-quality programming and provides free training on content and implementation of the Standards. The accompanying assessment, the Illinois Quality Program Self-Assessment (IL-QPSA), supports program providers, with guidance from ACT Now, to self-evaluate and establish the next steps to improve program quality.

All schools served under this grant will be required to complete the IL-QPSA each year and to align their programming with the Standards. ACT Now will support this through trainings, our free weekly newsletter, our repository of program curricula and activities, toolkits on a variety of different topics, and our online learning platform, the ACT Now Center for Afterschool Learning (ANCAL), which holds all archived live events and trainings, a variety of resources, and hundreds of training videos. ACT Now also currently offers numerous trainings, curricula, and activities for designing high-quality ELT programming. Community school practitioners have access to all these trainings, as well as community schools-specific trainings, some of which are tailored by region to meet specific needs.

Studies have found that afterschool programs offer several benefits, e.g., students who participate in afterschool programs are less likely to engage in criminal activity and risky behavior, are more aware of the dangers of risky behavior, and show fewer signs of aggressive and problematic behaviors.⁵⁵ ACT Now has relationships with several programs that work to

prevent juvenile crime and keep youth safe. One such program is Teen Responsibility, Education, Achievement, Caring, and Hope (Teen REACH), a statewide afterschool program. Teen REACH has been proven to keep youth safe and aid in preventing juvenile crime, providing core services including life skills; parental involvement; recreation, sports, cultural and artistic activities; adult mentors; and service learning. ACT Now supports Teen REACH grantees through webinars, trainings, guided site visits, and direct technical assistance.

With the resources from this grant, ACT Now will create workshops on planning, structuring, and implementing ELT, including finding community partners. We will offer targeted technical assistance to schools in conducting a needs assessment and asset map, identifying high-quality OST programs and services in their area, and raising awareness and understanding of the community schools strategy among all partners and stakeholders.

New programs will be identified and implemented based on the needs of each school community as indicated by needs assessments and gap analyses. These programs will include offerings such as academic enrichment, arts, sports, mentoring, physical and mental health services, and family programming and events. The community schools coordinator will hold meetings with all providers to ensure program quality, and ACT Now will offer training and technical support as needed.

To support students' readiness for kindergarten, ACT Now will continue to utilize our strong connections to key early childhood agencies and providers across the state (e.g., Illinois Action for Children, the Erikson Institute, and Child Care Resources and Referral agencies), and connecting districts and families to supports such as the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which provides access to developmental screenings, assistance paying for child care, and locating high-quality child care. As an approved trainer for the child care licensure Gateways

to Opportunity system, ACT Now will continue to offer trainings for early childhood program and education practitioners.

In Illinois, high-impact tutoring, leveraging the American Rescue Plan Act's (ARPA) Elementary and Secondary School Education Relief (ESSER) funding, helps support transitions for students entering kindergarten and transitioning between elementary school and middle school. As data collected by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) over the past three years showed a sharp drop in enrollment, ISBE worked to provide tutoring and supplemental services via the Jump Start program to increase enrollment and overarching academic outcomes for Illinois' youngest learners.

Expanded and extended learning opportunities should help to prepare young people for success in the workforce. ACT Now has a partnership with 220 Youth Leadership (220), whose mission is to provide youth with workforce skills.⁵⁶ Their turnkey courses will be available to program providers and youth at the schools served by this grant.

ACT Now will also offer community schools coordinator coaching. Community schools coordinators will meet monthly for training and networking opportunities covering the following topics: Needs Assessments and Asset Maps, Advisory Boards, Data Collection and Evaluation, Family and Community Engagement, Partnerships, and Community Organizing. The Standards and IL-QPSA will be incorporated into their training as well. We will survey coordinators about training needs throughout the grant term and develop new trainings to respond to those needs.

Family and Community Engagement

The ACT Now Family Engagement Toolkit, which incorporates the principles of ISBE's Family Engagement Framework, as well as the National PTA's Center for Family Engagement Framework, supports schools' family engagement work and includes evidence-based, research-

driven practices to increase engagement.⁵⁷ Additionally, ACT Now has developed multiple family engagement trainings that: define what high-quality family engagement looks like; analyze current family engagement practices; and explore new opportunities and strategies. These trainings incorporate dedicated time for attendees to draft family engagement goals and establish a system for ongoing family engagement.

Family liaisons can be a significant asset for building school-family relationships. As family members themselves, they may be able to develop trusting relationships more quickly with other family members, as well as offer specific assistance.⁵⁸ Many program providers are working to connect more consistently, and more deeply, with families and engage them in their organization's work (such as OST for youth, financial literacy work, immigration services and support, etc.). ACT Now has hosted community schools trainings that touch upon this topic and allow providers to share best practices and experiences working with families.

Engagement means more than attending programs and activities; families should have a voice in collaborative decision-making processes. Family presence on the school-based advisory committee, as well as any district-level advisory committees, will be a requirement for all schools served by the grant that ACT Now will assist with. We will also add involved family members to the statewide Steering Committee.

ACT Now will assist districts with identifying family needs through needs assessments and asset mapping trainings and supports. The community schools coordinator will organize parent/guardian workshops, family and community events, and other activities and services to help build positive connections between the school and parents/guardians as well as the surrounding community. Family nights to support academic learning will allow teachers to share with parents what their students are working on, and parent/guardian workshops will help parents

support their children’s schoolwork at home. Families will be invited into the community, building relationships with school staff, program staff, and each other. Partnerships with organizations like Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) can offer parents deeper connections to the school as they develop their skills to advocate for their needs and become leaders. Programs such as the Parent Mentor Program, through the Parent Engagement Institute, offer parents (largely Latina and Black mothers) a structured volunteering program that leads to deep engagement in the schools, a path to employment, and the development of leadership skills. Coordinators will also help connect adult family members to adult education opportunities in the surrounding community as needed, and/or bring classes into the school building such as GED, computer skills, and ELL classes.

Parents and guardians, as the adults often “most in control over the ACEs a child may experience,” may benefit from learning about ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and their long-term effects. Screening may be offered to determine parents’ own ACE history and access to mental health resources made available.⁵⁹

The community school coordinator will help facilitate referrals for families and connect them with resources as specific needs arise, such as housing, transportation, mental health, or adult education. This may involve sharing resources directly and/or connecting families with the appropriate person on the school staff, such as a counselor or social worker. Some families that may be reluctant to reach out to community agencies may feel more comfortable when that connection is facilitated by a trusted member of the community schools’ staff.

Alumni presence on community school advisory boards will support transitions from grade school to middle school, and from middle school to high school, by allowing alumni to help shape programming that will better prepare students for their next school level, as well as

build and maintain relationships with younger students still at the school. These students can also be engaged to speak to younger students about what to expect during educational transitions.

Supporting families and communities includes readying youth for success in the workforce. ACT Now has worked with many programs that develop internships and teach students career readiness skills to introduce partners and develop infrastructure for successful internship experiences. Additionally, ACT Now works with many of these programs as a technical assistance and support (TAS) provider, offering support in evaluating the effectiveness of the internship and resources to further develop opportunities available to youth. ACT Now will be able to leverage these relationships when establishing new internship opportunities in programs launched through this project to offer provider-led trainings, panel discussions, access to referrals from established programs, and sharing successful implementation methods.

Partnerships with local businesses may bring internship opportunities to students, and youth program providers may also offer internships, which ACT Now is well poised to support. Family programs will include information on applying to and paying for college and training programs, building resumes, and other workforce readiness skills, to help parents and/or guardians support their students in pursuing these goals, as well as supporting the adult family members in pursuing these goals themselves.

Collaborative Leadership and Practices

Shared decision-making and planning ensure that all stakeholders have a voice in building and growing their community schools, which improves program quality and contributes to sustainability over time.

ACT Now offers trainings on building, managing, and sustaining advisory boards, including the use of our advisory board toolkit. ACT Now collaborated with community schools

leaders from Chicago, West Chicago, and Bloomington to develop and facilitate a workshop on advisory boards for the national CSxFE Conference in 2022. At that conference, we also co-facilitated the statewide breakout session to deepen and grow our statewide network. Additionally, our own published report describes a variety of community schools structures used throughout the state.⁶⁰ Our ongoing relationships with leaders and staff from these different initiatives enable us to bring them to our community schools trainings as presenters for interactive conversations and shared best practices on the various ways that one can effectively approach community schools work.

This past year, ACT Now published a Creating Afterschool Partnerships toolkit that describes how to effectively form and sustain youth development partnerships between schools and community-based organizations. This toolkit breaks down the four phases of establishing meaningful partnerships: identification, building, implementation, and sustainability. It also includes a variety of templates, resources, and suggested language for the proposed activities, such as needs assessments, gap analyses, and memorandums of understanding. Part of building school partnerships means including those partners in leadership practices and meaningful decision-making. ACT Now will leverage this toolkit to help schools served by the grant develop their collaborative leadership practices.

On May 3rd, 2023, ACT Now hosted a statewide convening on community schools with the theme of Collaborative Leadership Practices. This convening provided training and networking opportunities for 126 attendees from throughout the state. The day consisted of five unique breakout sessions including the following topics: vision planning, administrative buy-in, policy and advocacy, data and evaluation, and a role-defining work session. It was a huge success as demonstrated by the feedback collected: 96 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the

information provided was high-quality; 94 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the materials presented helped them better understand the information; and 100 percent asked ACT Now to host the event again. This event demonstrates ACT Now's partnerships throughout the state, resources leveraged on collaborative leadership practices, and our ability to disseminate information to community school practitioners to assist with their success in this pillar.

With the additional resources provided by the Full-Service Community Schools state scaling grant, we will provide tailored support to target districts for setting up advisory boards, planning and facilitating ongoing board meetings, governance structures, and partnership meetings. We will offer districts technical assistance on conducting asset maps and identifying and engaging with community partners. We will also model collaborative leadership ourselves by conducting outreach to bring district-level leaders and school administrators onto the statewide Steering Committee.

As mentioned earlier, ACT Now will provide community schools coordinator coaching, monthly individual meetings, and site visits. This will help build their skills in all four pillars as they problem-solve and share best practices. Community schools coordinators will share their training needs during the grant term, and we will develop new trainings to respond to those needs. Individualized coaching will provide support that addresses the needs and concerns of specific schools and districts, including collaborative leadership practices and processes. Engaging a variety of stakeholders on site-based advisory councils, in addition to forms of information gathering, such as surveys and focus groups, will ensure that all possible voices are involved in planning, decision-making, and continuous program improvement. Overall, ACT Now is well-positioned to support community schools' collaborative leadership strategies in diverse settings across Illinois.

B. The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale.

1. Graphic and description of the logic model.

The design of the proposed project is outlined in the attached logic model. The first section, *Resources and Inputs*, identifies the supports we will use for the project. In addition to the money awarded from this grant, a variety of funding streams will be used to ensure longevity and sustainability, including those already in existence at the school level, such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) and Restore, Reinvest, Renew (R3); technical assistance grants that currently fund ACT Now, such as Teen REACH and the Reimagine Public Safety Act (RPSA); and existing streams that ACT Now will connect to schools and their partners, such as the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). ACT Now has existing resources, staff, consultants, and expertise that will contribute to the project, including the Family Engagement Toolkit, the Creating Afterschool Partnerships Toolkit, the Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards trainings, and the ACT Now Center for Afterschool Learning (ANCAL). The leadership guiding this project will come from the existing ACT Now Community Schools Guiding Team and ACT Now Leadership Team. ACT Now will tap into the work of several partner organizations, including ISBE, the named school districts, and our expansive statewide network.

The second section, *Activities*, highlights the programmatic components that we will implement and support to achieve the outcomes. Hiring and supporting a community schools coordinator at each school will enable one point of contact to establish and maintain community partnerships while also removing the burden of extra work on the existing school staff. Additionally, there will be activities that are based around all four pillars of the community schools model and include the pipeline services identified in this grant.

The Integrated Student Supports (ISS) pillar includes social, health, nutrition, and mental health services and supports, as well as juvenile crime prevention and rehabilitation programs. Activities in this pillar will include supports for social-emotional competencies, such as the Statewide SEL Hubs and ACT Now SEL webinars. The ACT Now Peace Circles training will provide a base for learning and implementing restorative practices. Existing services at the school will continue to support student health, including school nurses and counselors. ACT Now will help foster partnerships with local health services and organizations to expand each school's on-site health options.

The activities within the Expanded and Enriched Learning Time (ELT) pillar include early childhood education programs, OST programs, support for students' transitions, and support for post-secondary and workforce readiness. ACT Now's Afterschool Map and Database will be a key tool in finding and establishing community partners for OST programs. Programs will use the evidence-based Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards and accompanying IL-QPSA to ensure programs are high-quality. ACT Now will provide support in accessing CCAP funds. Program providers will access the asynchronous accredited training courses on ANCAL to deepen their knowledge and expand their competencies. ACT Now will provide targeted technical assistance for partnering with or creating high-quality afterschool programs. ACT Now has expansive OST curriculum and activities to support established programs via our Afterschool STEM Specialist, STEM OST Guidebook with curriculum matrix, and the Mizzen by Mott app. The partnership with 220 Youth Leadership will facilitate increased post-secondary and workforce readiness.

The Family and Community Engagement pillar revolves around supporting families, including them in school processes and events, and strengthening community partnerships. The

ACT Now Family Engagement Toolkit and accompanying trainings will provide a framework for schools to create a cohesive family engagement curriculum that can be regularly evaluated, adjusted, and improved upon. The Parent Mentor Program provides a pathway to employment for interested family members through school volunteer opportunities and the development of leadership skills. ACT Now highly encourages community schools to hire and foster family liaisons and will support interested schools in that process. To best understand how to engage families and communities, ACT Now will offer support in the form of trainings and templates for the execution of community needs and strengths assessments.

Within the Collaborative Leadership Practices pillar, ACT Now will focus efforts on creating broad-based leadership structures. This includes the creation and development of a Community Schools Advisory Board at participating schools using our Advisory Board Tools. The tools and resources in the Creating Afterschool Partnerships toolkit will help schools garner authentic community involvement. Community schools coordinator coaching will help develop leaders within that role and empower coordinators to work collaboratively with their many stakeholders. Finally, the establishment of a diverse statewide Steering Committee will provide cross-agency coordination to foster the growth of community schools across the state.

The *Outputs* section of the logic model identifies the data points that will measure the *Activities* in each pillar (including pipeline services) and the objectives named in this grant application. The *Short-Term Outcomes* portion looks at results that will be measured in the first one to two years of the grant period and their associated objectives. The *Long-Term Outcomes* look at the results the project will achieve after the completion of the five-year grant period. The project will improve outcomes for students, schools, and communities in Illinois.

- 2. Research or evaluation findings that suggest the project component is likely to improve relevant outcomes.**

Each of the activities named in the logic model and in the previous sections that address the pipeline services within each pillar have been chosen based on relevant evidence and research as detailed in the *Quality of the Project Services* section.

Namely, the following sources support our overall rationale. The report *Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence* summarizes the findings from 143 research studies on community schools and their impact. The authors effectively demonstrate the four-pillar model as a strategy to provide equitable and high-quality education to students. Despite the wide variety of community school structures and approaches, those that implement with fidelity elements from the four-pillar model find the most success. The report goes further in its analysis of each pillar and provides examples from schools of possible services and partnerships.⁶¹ Ultimately, the findings in this report reinforce the necessity of a unified state network (such as ACT Now) working to provide high-quality supports and targeted tools for community schools practitioners across the state. When school administrators can rely on an organization providing targeted support, data structures, evidence-based frameworks, and evaluation models, they are better-positioned to implement the necessary structures in a high-quality manner.

The national Coalition for Community Schools has developed a detailed set of Community Schools Standards (CS Standards) that are supported by research. They start with a set of seven guiding principles that provide the framework for implementation. The CS Standards themselves are split into two parts: (1) structures and functions of a community school, and (2) core program elements. Each part includes the ideal standard to achieve and indicators to measure progress, along with potential resources to support.⁶² ACT Now will use these CS Standards, in combination with our own Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards, to

structure community schools coordinator coaching and training. The work of each community schools coordinator will be reflective of both sets of standards to ensure best practices are followed and the model is implemented with fidelity.

Extensive data and research contributed to the development of the Illinois Afterschool Quality Standards (Standards). By attending high-quality afterschool programs, youth can enhance their social-emotional competencies, engage in positive behaviors, and improve academic school performance. The meta-analysis found in *The Impact of After-School Programs That Promote Personal and Social Skills* presents data that reinforces the above outcomes. It also determines that these results are possible if afterschool programs use evidence-based approaches, such as those outlined in the Standards.^{63, 64}

Engaged families contribute to higher academic success and positively impact whole school outcomes. *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* identifies the need for a true partnership between families and schools. The data in this book reports that improved outcomes due to increased family involvement hold across a variety of factors, including gender, race, socioeconomic status, and academic ability of students.⁶⁵ In addition, *In the Context of Risk: Supportive Adults and the School Engagement of Middle School Students*, examines the association between the number of supportive adults in a student's life (whether in the home or in the community) and their engagement in school. Results show that students with supportive adults are more likely to engage with their schooling and improve academically.⁶⁶ These resources together highlight the need for engaged families in schools across the state.

In addition to the aforementioned resources, the section above incorporates research-based evidence for each named objective. The research cited directly contributed to the writing

of the objectives outlined in this grant application and how achieving those objectives will contribute to the overall outcomes of students being prepared for kindergarten, achieving academically, and being supported by engaged family members.

IV. Competitive Preference Priorities

A. Competitive Preference Priority 1—*Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs.*

- 1. Creating education or work-based settings that are supportive, positive, identity-safe, and inclusive with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, language, and disability status, through developing trusting relationships between students (including underserved students), educators, families, and community partners:**

ACT Now’s mission has equity and racial justice at its core. We are driven to ensuring that all youth are prepared for success in school, career, and life through participation in high-quality community schools programs. We know that this requires an intentional focus on historically marginalized populations to ensure this outcome. ACT Now commits to addressing inequity in our own work and within our organization, and we strive to advance the afterschool field's overall efforts to address inequities. We also recognize that this is an ongoing process that will require intentional thought, education, and action. As we move forward to actively ensure that equity is intentionally and sustainably integrated into all that we do, the following values will be at the core of our work: advocate for funding to reach the youth most in need, ensure providers have the skills and resources necessary to execute programming with an equity mindset, and incorporate diverse voices into our leadership and feedback on our work.

ACT Now, with the consultation of Thrive Paradigm, has undertaken an internal equity audit and implementation plan process to ensure that all our external work has a strong foundation in the principles of equity. In July 2023, we began a three-year implementation plan based on goals from the equity audit.

Authentic family engagement will help to build a supportive, positive, identity-safe, and inclusive culture. By utilizing strategies such as engaging parent liaisons that identify with families in the school community in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and/or language, we will build relationships and ensure that all voices are heard and needs recognized. Representation of families on Advisory Boards and in other decision-making arenas will add to this. We will require all partner schools to facilitate meaningful and consistent family engagement to meet our goals with regards to inclusion. ACT Now has already developed a variety of trainings and toolkits on family engagement to support this process.

Integrated student supports, such as social-emotional learning and physical and mental health services, professional development on equity and inclusion, and collaborative leadership practices will assist participating schools in building safe and inclusive spaces for all students, including those with disabilities. ACT Now is a statewide leader in providing trainings on gender and sexuality to educators, offering Gender and Sexuality in OST 101 and 102 professional development courses. ACT Now, as the statewide afterschool network, has access to a variety of partners and content experts that develop curriculum focused on inclusion, such as the 1619 project. Throughout the year, ACT Now also hosts a variety of trainings for educators focused on trauma-informed care and racial equity.

Through ongoing communication with ISBE and practitioners in the field, ACT Now shares the variety of resources created by ISBE, such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) support hubs, which offer professional development, training, and support for SEL programs.

All OST programs will be required to accommodate students with disabilities, and community schools coordinators will receive professional development and support to facilitate equitable inclusion.

2. Providing multi-tiered systems of supports that address learning barriers both in and out of the classroom, that enable healthy development and respond to students’ needs and which may include evidence-based trauma informed practices and professional development for educators on avoiding deficit-based approaches:

Schools throughout Illinois utilize multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) to address a variety of needs. All participating schools will utilize MTSS to ensure that all students have the necessary supports to thrive. As with all community schools services, there is no “one size fits all” model; rather than require a specific model or curriculum across the board, schools will employ targeted, tailored interventions based on the needs and assets of each school community. Statewide community schools coordinator training will build capacity in evidence-based, trauma-informed practices, and professional development will be offered to schools to support strengths-based approaches to students. One resource for this work in Illinois is the Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing (REACH) Statewide Initiative program through the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago Center for Childhood Resilience, in partnership with ISBE.⁶⁷

ACT Now also has long standing relationships with organizations that specialize in providing trauma-informed practices training to youth development providers across the state, such as the Illinois Collaboration on Youth (ICOY). Topics include Impact of Trauma, Social Justice and Dismantling Organizational Racism, and Working with LGBTQIA+ Youth. Further, ACT Now has developed a variety of trainings and webinars focused on SEL, restorative justice, and Peace Circles. These trainings support educators in meeting the full needs of their students and in choosing an asset-based mindset to ensure students reach their full potential.

B. Competitive Preference Priority 2—*Strengthening Cross-Agency Coordination and Community Engagement to Advance Systemic Change*

A key piece of ACT Now’s work in afterschool and community schools is cross-agency collaboration. The Steering Committee will bring together representatives from various state agencies, as well as leaders in fields such as early childhood education, youth development, and violence prevention. This will strengthen cross-agency coordination at the state level and give community organizations opportunities to engage with these state agencies and each other—having an expert in the field of violence prevention on the Steering Committee will bring expertise and perspective on how to address these issues in the context of community schools.

Quarterly professional development brings together practitioners within, and across, regions to share best practices and resources. Trainings on building partnerships and family and community engagement increase practitioners’ capacity to engage various agencies and stakeholders in supporting children and families.

ACT Now is involved with multiple violence prevention initiatives in the state of Illinois. One such program, R3, funds grants for violence prevention, reentry, youth development, economic development and civil legal aid services in areas suffering from violence exacerbated by concentrated disinvestment. ACT Now receives funding through the Illinois Department of Human Services’ (IDHS) Office of Firearm Violence Prevention (OFVP) to provide technical assistance to RPSA grantees. Grant dollars focus on three types of programming: Youth Services, Violence Prevention, and Youth Intervention, as well as Medicaid trauma recovery services. A member of IDHS will sit on the Steering Committee.

V. Invitational Priority

ACT Now’s proven track record in assisting schools with grade transitions, attendance improvement, and effective family engagement will ensure our ability to address the *Invitational Priority*.

Cross Sector Collaboration: In our ongoing state-level work, we will continue to support cross-sector collaboration. Our Steering Committee will include representatives from various state agencies, family engagement experts, school districts, youth development and social services organizations, and early childhood agencies and organizations. Our family engagement toolkit, trainings, and technical support will help schools build strong and authentic relationships with families to support childrens' success.

Continuity of Services and Instructional Alignment in Preschool through Grade 3: One major benefit of community schools is the strong focus on collaboration between school leaders and families through advisory boards. Our project will require that each school recruit and maintain an advisory board. Advisory boards will have set aside time to discuss coordination of services for students with high need and to ensure continuity of their services. Moreover, external and community partners often work with multiple grade levels and build strong connections to families and the siblings throughout a family. This consistent relationship becomes a huge asset in easing the challenges of grade transitions.

Attendance: We know that one caring adult in the building increases students' connection to school. One way to improve educational attainment for students is to utilize strategies focused on attendance, as attendance is tied to academic performance. High-quality, engaging OST programs are proven to improve attendance, and all schools receiving funds under this grant will provide OST programs aligned with the Standards and complete the IL-QPSA each year. Other proven strategies include clear attendance goals and expectations, explicit communication to families, and outreach to families when students are absent (either via phone calls or home visits). Illinois requires schools to offer services to students and families, such as

parent conferences, student/family counseling, and connections to community services, to reduce truancy.⁶⁸

Healthcare can also be a barrier to school attendance. Students with unmanaged medical conditions may miss more school than they would otherwise, reasons including medical appointments. The building of a healthcare center, where possible, or bringing services such as vision screenings and dental care into schools, will increase students' and families' access to preventive care and facilitate connections to local healthcare providers.

Schools will be encouraged to develop attendance teams in conjunction with their advisory boards that will meet regularly to review data and implement strategies such as home visits and teacher calls to parents.

Family Engagement: ACT Now has a history of building capacity to promote effective family engagement. We developed the Family Engagement Toolkit to support practitioners in developing and strengthening family engagement work. ACT Now has years of experience developing and conducting trainings on family engagement. These trainings define high-quality family engagement and how that may differ per location/community/roles/etc., analyze current family engagement practices, and explore new opportunities to engage the community and families, offering opportunities to draft ongoing family engagement goals and plans.

For family engagement to be effective, parents and guardians must have a voice in collaborative decision-making processes; all schools served by this grant will be required to have parent/guardian presence on the school-based advisory board, as well as any district-level advisory boards. Community schools coordinators will receive training on building inclusive advisory boards. ACT Now will engage adult family members to join our statewide Steering

Committee. ACT Now will also support schools in accessing resources and programs that offer parents a path to employment and leadership in their school community.

VI. Quality of the Project Services

A. The extent to which the applicant will ensure that a diversity of perspectives are brought to bear in the design and operation of the proposed project, including those of students, youth, families, educators and staff, beneficiaries of services, school leadership, and community leadership.

ACT Now understands and has a deep commitment to the collaborative nature of community schools. As such, we will ensure that diverse perspectives join in the design and operation of this project. Our statewide Steering Committee will incorporate voices from state agencies, youth serving organizations, families, and community advocates. We will work with all project schools to ensure that they have robust advisory boards representing their entire community. Attention to diversity of perspective at every level will ensure that collaboration is the bedrock of this project.

1. Diversity of perspective through the statewide Steering Committee

At the statewide level, ACT Now will develop the Steering Committee by intentionally inviting participants with a variety of backgrounds and expertise. This will include leaders in early childhood education, violence prevention, youth development, health and wellness, and community partnerships, as well as educators, parents, and youth. This group will advise on identifying which districts to collaborate with, the finalized memorandum of understanding (MOU), and strategies to support districts. They will review evaluation data and provide advice on strategies for improvement. A list of tentative Steering Committee members can be found in the *Quality of Management Plan*.

2. Diversity of perspective through community school coordinators in target schools

At each school, community schools coordinators will facilitate the development of Advisory Boards, composed of parents, students, alumni, community leaders, school administrators, teachers, and staff. This will ensure a diversity of perspectives in the decision-making processes around design, implementation, and continuous program improvement.

ACT Now has developed robust resources to assist community schools in developing advisory boards, including a toolkit that describes the purpose and structure of advisory boards and walks through the process with tips and resources. We have offered many trainings on advisory boards at the local, state, and national level, as well as offered technical assistance and support. Community schools coordinator training will include sessions on developing advisory boards and coaching on developing diverse and inclusive groups.

3. A description of the capacity of the eligible entity to coordinate and provide pipeline services at two or more full-service community schools in each of the LEAs included in the application.

ACT Now has the most extensive community schools network in the state of Illinois. ACT Now holds convenings for this network on a quarterly basis in three state regions (Chicago, Chicago Suburbs, and Downstate) to ensure that networking opportunities and content are representative of the region's location. These convenings include professional development and policy updates pertinent to community schools. ACT Now is well-versed in the pillars of the community schools model and has years of experience facilitating trainings for established community schools to improve program and service quality. ACT Now's fiscal sponsor, Metropolitan Family Services (MFS), supports a community schools initiative within their agency, further strengthening ACT Now's ability to offer strategies for partnerships, effective programming, and continuous improvement to community schools.

ACT Now provides technical assistance to grantees of 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) and Teen REACH. We offer Town Halls to 21st CCLC grantees on a bi-monthly basis and host an Advisory Council, which includes statewide grantee representation in an audience with ISBE. For Teen REACH, technical assistance and support (TAS) includes tailoring professional development to specific grantee needs, compliance monitoring, and offering agency specific recommendations to improve program quality.

All above services are statewide initiatives through which ACT Now offers diverse resources and support applicable to the youth development field at large. ACT Now has also developed resources for specific regions to provide more localized support where necessary.

The following describes ACT Now's capacity specific to each pipeline service area.

a. High-quality early childhood education programs.

ACT Now has strong, established partnerships with Illinois Action for Children, the Erikson Institute, and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). ACT Now also works with statewide providers of early childhood programs, such as the YMCA, in a variety of capacities. Through these statewide connections, ACT Now can ensure that school districts have partnerships with high-quality early childhood programming. ACT Now is an approved trainer for the child care licensure Gateways to Opportunity system and is well-versed in the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP).

b. High-quality school and out-of-school time programs and strategies.

ACT Now is the statewide leader in the school-community partnership and OST spaces, with years of experience in championing the afterschool field and developing resources to expand and support the scope of afterschool in the state.

ACT Now, in partnership with a variety of stakeholders and youth development experts, created the Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards (Standards), which capture practices

that have been demonstrated, through research, to lead to quality programs and outcomes for children. The Standards are available to all youth development workers for free; ACT Now also provides free training that reviews the Standards and how to implement them. Providers can use ACT Now's accompanying assessment tool, the IL-QPSA, at no cost to evaluate and establish next steps to improve the quality of their program. The IL-QPSA is based in the Standards and providers are guided by ACT Now staff. As a result of the IL-QPSA's evident benefit to the OST field, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) requires participation in the IL-QPSA as a grant deliverable for grantees of multiple funding streams.

ACT Now provides TAS to grantees of Teen REACH and RPSA programs and works closely with ISBE to provide TAS to 21st CCLC and other grantees. This includes compliance monitoring through site visits, resource development, professional development offerings, quarterly meetings, advocacy, resources for curricula and program development, full technical and administrative support through the IL-QPSA process, and one-on-one services to all participating agencies.

ACT Now offers supports and trainings to schools, school districts, and community-based organizations (CBOs) in establishing lasting partnerships to expand opportunities for youth during OST. In addition to live training sessions, ACT Now has a repository of curricula and activities and has developed numerous toolkits that are available to the field for free, covering a variety of topics, including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), Family Engagement, Trauma-Informed Care in Afterschool, Starting an Afterschool Program, College and Career Readiness, and Summer Learning. ACT Now's online learning platform holds all archived live events and trainings, resources, and hundreds of training videos available to the field at no cost.

ACT Now is an expert in building program capacity. ACT Now's free weekly newsletter compiles resources that providers can access to increase capacity and quality and includes state and federal policy updates, as well as updates on new funding opportunities with direct access to information and applications. ACT Now's Map and Database (Map) allows program providers to self-report their programs and highlight the ages served and services provided; organizations and school districts can then use the Map to identify local partners within their area.

- c. Support for a child's transition to elementary school, from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, and from high school into and through postsecondary education and into the workforce, including any comprehensive readiness assessment determined necessary.**

ACT Now recognizes the importance of transitional periods and has produced numerous resources to encourage productive growth between grade levels. One resource is our career exploration curriculum for youth in elementary, middle, and high school levels, offering high-quality curriculum and materials to help youth feel more prepared and confident for the workforce transition. Workforce readiness curriculum is available through the *Mizzen* by Mott application. This app includes a catalog of resources to help youth development professionals design and implement engaging lessons and activities in content areas such as 21st Century Skills, College and Career Readiness, and Entrepreneurship. *Mizzen* by Mott has curricula to support academic achievement and remediation as children change grades and is available to ACT Now's membership free of charge. Finally, ACT Now's family engagement resources also help maintain relationships and connections as students transition between grades, and ultimately to postsecondary education and careers.

- d. Family and community engagement supports, which may include engaging or supporting families at school or at home.**

ACT Now's Family Engagement Toolkit is a guide for OST providers to involve families in their child(ren)'s schooling and afterschool. Various barriers can impede school involvement for some caretakers; this toolkit can help establish afterschool as a gateway to school involvement for parents who may not otherwise feel connected to their child(ren)'s schooling. ACT Now has hosted virtual trainings on how to use the toolkit effectively, now archived on the ACT Now website.

ACT Now has developed additional family engagement trainings, each of which defines high-quality family engagement and how that may differ per location/community/etc., analyzes current family engagement practices, and explores new opportunities to engage the community and families, including drafting ongoing family engagement goals and plans.

e. Activities that support postsecondary and workforce readiness, which may include job training, internship opportunities, and career counseling.

ACT Now has a partnership with 220 Youth Leadership (220), whose mission is to provide youth with necessary workforce skills. 220's turnkey courses, on topics such as out-of-school time (OST) and workforce development, "focus on success strategies and frameworks that apply to any discipline,"⁶⁹ and are available for both program providers and youth. ACT Now partners with 220 to grant access to the course catalog to youth and providers free of cost.

ACT Now's College and Career Readiness Guidebook provides resources and curriculum to providers for career exploration strategies at all ages from elementary through high school. Further, ACT Now has vast experience working with programs that develop internships and teach students career readiness skills, to introduce partners and develop infrastructure for successful internship experiences. ACT Now works with many of these programs as a TAS provider, offering support in evaluating internships' effectiveness and resources to further

develop opportunities for youth. ACT Now will be able to leverage these relationships when establishing new internship opportunities in programs launched through this project.

f. Community-based support for students who have attended the schools in the area served by the pipeline, or students who are members of the community, facilitating their continued connection to the community and success in postsecondary education and the workforce.

ACT Now's advisory board materials encourage the inclusion and voice of former participants. As alumni have directly experienced programs as a target audience, they have invaluable insight regarding improvement efforts, effective strategies, and opportunities for greater engagement. ACT Now also encourages programs to employ alums after they have aged out of the program, to increase youth employability skills and confidence.

g. Social, health, nutrition, and mental health services and supports.

ACT Now is highly experienced in creating and facilitating trainings to support community schools in supporting the whole child. These trainings are specifically designed to fit the community schools model, reference the four pillars as essential elements, and are tailored to the region of the state being served, to ensure content is accurate and resources are accessible to attendees. Topics have included trauma-informed practices, creating a culture of support, and bullying and conflict resolution.

ACT Now currently has a membership database of over 2,500 programs, providing an expansive network of partners that offer a plethora of services to various groups. This enables ACT Now to connect providers to the right resources and suggest partnerships that are strategically matched to meet needs.

ACT Now works closely with the Illinois Collaboration on Youth (ICOY) to deliver trainings to grantees of various funding streams and publicizes them to the entire membership

database as they become available. ICOY specializes in delivering trauma-informed practices trainings to youth development providers statewide.

ACT Now works in partnership with the Illinois Commission to End Hunger to coordinate advocacy efforts statewide and build collaborative partnerships with various entities across the state to help reduce hunger statewide.⁷⁰ This network also provides access to nutrition resources and partners across the state. ACT Now also works with Strengthening Chicago's Youth (SCY) through Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago in strategies towards violence prevention.

h. Juvenile crime prevention and rehabilitation programs.

ACT Now has a strong partnership with Fight Crime: Invest in Kids (Fight Crime), a nationwide effort to promote youth success through evidence-based policies and programs through the Council for Strong America. Fight Crime advocates for investments in evidence-based solutions to steer youth away from crime and has identified afterschool programs as a key intervention strategy in keeping youth safe and away from crime.

ACT Now works directly with Teen REACH, a grant program funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) that has proven to keep youth safe and aid in preventing juvenile crime. Teen REACH offers afterschool programs to provide a safe environment, with caring adult role models helping youth reach their full academic potential and develop skills for attaining future goals. ACT Now supports Teen REACH with compliance monitoring and TAS to granted agencies.

The Restore, Reinvest, Renew Program (R3), signed into law by Governor J.B. Pritzker in 2019, funds grants for violence prevention, reentry, youth development, economic development, and civil legal aid services in areas suffering from violence, concentrated

disinvestment, high rates of gun injuries, child poverty, unemployment, and incarceration. ACT Now will help providers leverage these services.

B. The extent to which the services provided reflect up-to-date knowledge from research and effective practice.

Current knowledge and research are utilized in identifying pipeline services to be offered. ACT Now's ongoing interaction with various state agencies and communication with community schools practitioners keeps them up to date on best practices and research in the field. Specific examples of research informing recommendations for pipeline services are detailed below.

1. Quality of the Project Services: Pipeline Services

A statewide approach to building and sustaining community schools cannot be an entirely standardized approach. While certain core aspects, such as the four pillars and a full-time community schools coordinator, must be included in all community schools work if it is to be effective, each district, neighborhood, and school have different populations, resources, and needs. The continuum of coordinated supports, services, and opportunities for children from birth to-and-through success in postsecondary education and career will look somewhat different for each school. In this section, we propose the types of strategies that will be effective to address, through services or programs (including integrated student supports), the following:

a. High-quality early childhood education programs.

Participation in high-quality early childhood programs has been shown to significantly impact children's readiness for kindergarten, their overall trajectory in school and work,⁷¹ and skills related to math or language.⁷² High-quality programs include family engagement, as a great deal of learning in early years happens outside of traditional school hours.

High-quality early childhood education includes well-trained staff, academic skill building, and social emotional learning.⁷³ Data from early childhood programs illustrates their

benefits; in one Chicago multi-site child care program, 100 percent of their participants transitioned to kindergarten, 98 percent received health screenings, and 80 percent met or exceeded language benchmarks at the conclusion of the program.⁷⁴

ACT Now will leverage available services to further expand opportunities for early childhood education across the state. One major resource for this is the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which provides a variety of supports, including access to developmental screenings, locating high-quality child care, and assistance paying for child care. As an approved trainer for the Gateways to Opportunity child care licensure system, ACT Now will continue to offer trainings for early childhood program and education practitioners.

Community schools in Illinois already support the child care needs of families across the state by helping parents and guardians apply for CCAP and/or other child care vouchers, which go to providers to facilitate programming and provide child care. Leveraging systems in place, community school coordinators will work with school staff, community partners, and families to connect children to high-quality child care, preschool, and other services as needed.

b. High-quality school and out-of-school-time programs and strategies.

In order to significantly impact students' academic achievement and potential for future success, programs must do more than simply offer adult supervision. "For expanded learning time and opportunities, students who participate for longer hours or a more extended period receive the most benefit, as do those attending programs that offer activities that are engaging, are well aligned with the instructional day...and that address whole-child interests and needs."⁷⁵

Research has shown that OST programs complement school day academics to strengthen understanding of academic concepts and increase engagement in school. High-quality programs offer a different type of learning environment, in which students who struggle during the

traditional school day may find success. Relationships with OST teachers and coaches can be more meaningful, with smaller student to teacher ratios and opportunities to interact more closely.⁷⁶ This leads to increased engagement in school; research indicates that having even one trusted adult at school increases students' desire to be in the school building,⁷⁷ which in turn positively impacts truancy and absenteeism.⁷⁸

As the lead developer of, and sole trainer on, the Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards (Standards), ACT Now is highly qualified to support districts and community schools staff in identifying high-quality programming. ACT Now will do so through trainings, our free weekly newsletter, our repository of program curricula and activities, toolkits on a variety of different topics, and our online learning platform, ANCAL.

Accessing and maintaining high-quality programs requires long term partnerships with program providers. ACT Now will continue to offer trainings on effectively partnering with local organizations, positive youth development, and a host of other topics. ACT Now's interactive Map and Database allows providers to self-report their program and service offerings, allowing organizations and school districts to identify local partners within their area.

The full-time community schools coordinator will be the point of contact for all partners offering programs and services, ensuring that all providers meet quality standards and have measurable goals for the outcomes of their programs. Based on school and community needs assessments, with input from school leaders and staff, programs will include academic enrichment, arts, sports, mentoring, physical and mental health services, and family programming and events. ACT Now will offer training and technical support as needed.

- c. Support for a child's transition to elementary school, from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, and from high school into and through postsecondary education and into the**

workforce, including any comprehensive readiness assessment determined necessary.

Supporting a child throughout their educational journey is a cornerstone of the community schools framework and a priority for Illinois schools. Enrichment programming and services that boost academic outcomes for students, such as homework help, project-based learning, and tutoring, support skill development as students transition between grade levels.

Research indicates that academic performance in the eighth-to-ninth grade transition may predict whether or not a student will graduate from high school in four years, or at all.⁷⁹ In Illinois, community schools have resulted in increased student interest in school and completion of homework, improved attendance and grades, and increased rates of high school graduation.⁸⁰ Further, data suggests that integrated afterschool programming is linked to students feeling more prepared for college and careers. OST programming offers opportunities for students to work on different social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies. Studies suggest that SEL competencies, such as self-reflection and self-evaluation, are crucial to understanding transitions in one's learning, especially as they pertain to college and career readiness.⁸¹ As previously noted, Illinois' community schools encompass these services; the FSCS state scaling grant would expand upon these opportunities and reach more students across the state.

Scholars define high-impact tutoring as one-on-one or small group instructional sessions by educators, afterschool providers, paraprofessionals, volunteers, and/or family members.⁸² In Illinois, high-impact tutoring is helping to support transitions for students entering kindergarten and transitioning between elementary school and middle school, through an initiative developed by ISBE, with members of the P-20 Council (a consortium of state agencies working to support equitable educational outcomes).

Special attention was initially given to children entering kindergarten and first grade, as data collected by ISBE over the previous three years showed a sharp drop in enrollment. ISBE provided tutoring and supplemental services via the Jump Start program to increase enrollment, student attendance, and overarching academic outcomes for Illinois' youngest learners. At a 2022 ISBE Board Meeting, several school district superintendents shared that high-impact tutoring reinforced their students' skills critical to language, literacy, and SEL development.

With the Full-Service Community Schools state scaling grant, Illinois' community schools will utilize structures and funding in place to continue to provide high-quality services for children's transitions from school to school, building upon existing capacity rather than duplicating efforts. ACT Now and ISBE will work with the identified school districts to leverage the high-impact tutoring and Jump Start programs to provide services where needed.

d. Family and community engagement and supports, which may include engaging or supporting families at school or at home.

Family engagement is a foundational component of community schools work; done well, it facilitates trusting relationships as it supports families and children to reach their full potential. Just as children who struggle during the regular school day may thrive in OST, OST programs and activities can be a gateway for parent/guardian involvement in the school community. The ACT Now Family Engagement Toolkit is a resource that can support schools in developing and strengthening their family engagement work.

A welcoming environment is crucial for engaging families in a meaningful way, and the ACT Now toolkit offers strategies for this. Some aspects of a welcoming environment include actively inviting parents into conversations and events, creating written materials in all languages that families speak at home, having visual evidence, such as artwork or signage, explicitly

welcoming families into the school space, and greeting parents and guardians warmly and enthusiastically when they enter the school.⁸³

ACT Now has developed various family engagement trainings, each of which defines high-quality family engagement and how that may differ per location/community/roles/etc., analyzes current family engagement practices, and explores new opportunities to engage the community and families, as well as including real time work sessions to draft ongoing family engagement goals and establish a system for continuous family engagement.

Engagement means more than attending programs and activities. Parents and guardians must have a voice in collaborative decision-making processes; all schools served by this grant will be required to have parent/guardian presence on the school-based advisory board, as well as any district-level advisory boards. ACT Now will engage adult family members to join our statewide Steering Committee.

The community schools coordinator will organize parent/guardian workshops, family and community events, and other activities and services to help build positive connections between the school and parents/guardians as well as the surrounding community. Family nights to support academic learning will allow teachers to share with parents what their students are working on, and family workshops will help parents support their children's schoolwork at home. Families will be invited to build community together, building relationships with school staff, program staff, and each other. Partnerships with organizations like COFI and the Parent Mentor Program can offer parents deeper connections to the school as they develop skills to become leaders in their school communities. Coordinators can also help adult family members to connect to adult education opportunities such as GED, computer skills, and ELL classes.

As the point of contact for all programs and services, the community school coordinator will help to facilitate referrals for families and connect them with resources as specific needs arise, such as housing, transportation, mental health, adult education, or other issues.

Connections between families and community organizations may be more easily facilitated by a trusted member of the community schools' staff.

e. Activities that support postsecondary and workforce readiness, which may include job training, internship opportunities, and career counseling.

ACT Now has worked with many programs that develop internships and teach students career readiness skills to introduce partners and develop infrastructure for successful internships. ACT Now provides technical assistance to many of these programs, offering support in evaluating the quality of the internship and resources to further develop opportunities. ACT Now will leverage these relationships to offer provider-led trainings, panel discussions, access to referrals from established programs, and information about successful implementation methods.

One major resource in this area is ACT Now's partnership with 220 Youth Leadership (220), whose mission is to provide youth with workforce skills, many of which are learned outside the classroom. Their turnkey courses on a variety of different topic areas will be available to program providers and youth at the schools served by this grant.

ACT Now's College and Career Readiness Guidebook provides resources and curriculum to providers for career exploration strategies at all ages from elementary through high school; high-quality tools encourage youth to begin thinking strategically about their postsecondary education plans and explore future careers.

Many OST programs foster 21st century skills, such as technological literacy, problem solving, teamwork, and persistence. Partnerships with local businesses may bring internship

opportunities to students, and youth program providers may also offer internships, which ACT Now is well poised to support. Family programs will include information on applying to and paying for college and training programs, as well as workforce readiness skills, to help parents support their students in pursuing these goals, and/or pursue these goals themselves.

f. Community-based support for students who have attended the schools in the area served by the pipeline, or students who are members of the community, facilitating their continued connection to the community and success in postsecondary education and the workforce.

As community organizations serve students and families in schools, they will develop relationships with young people that can continue beyond their school years. Many mentoring and youth development programs intentionally stay connected with alumni after graduation, offering ongoing support and, at times, employment, as well as membership on boards and committees. Schools will be strongly encouraged to include alumni on their advisory boards, contributing their perspective as former program participants to continuous improvement efforts. Alumni presence on community school advisory boards will also support connections to the community, as alumni can help shape programming to better prepare students for their next school level, build and maintain relationships with younger students at the school, and share with younger students what to expect in transitions to postsecondary education and the workforce.

Community schools will be encouraged to incorporate the presence of community organizations and services into community events, e.g., a local health center hosting an info table at a community soccer game, as well as hosting resource fairs.

ACT Now also encourages programs to employ alumni, continuing the investment into the community as well as the youth themselves. Alumni can bring the participant's perspective to their work, and existing familiarity with program staff and the program can increase the likelihood of a successful work experience.

Partnerships with local trade schools, colleges, and businesses will help students to gain the training and education they need to pursue their chosen careers.

g. Social, health, nutrition, and mental health services and supports.

ACT Now will continue to develop and facilitate trainings to support community schools in building infrastructure that supports the whole child. We will continue to tailor these trainings by region and/or district to ensure that accurate and useful information is presented. Training topics have included trauma-informed practices, creating a culture of support and supporting staff, bullying, and conflict resolution. ACT Now's membership database of over 2,500 programs comprises a network of programs and agencies that serve a variety of ages, demographics, and community areas. All schools, districts, and programs have free access to the database, and ACT Now can help community schools connect to these resources and suggest partnerships that are strategically matched to meet needs and fill service gaps.

Community schools in Illinois with existing deep relationships with families and communities before the COVID-19 pandemic were able to quickly pivot during the pandemic to meet developing needs by means of offering grocery pickup days, vaccine clinics, and online cooking and nutrition classes. Through building trusting relationships with families and connecting a variety of community partners to the schools, school and partner staff will be able to connect children and families to health, nutrition, and mental health services more effectively. Where needed, mental health services and social-emotional learning (SEL) will be brought into, or increased at, the schools served by this grant. ACT Now will continue to offer trainings on trauma-informed care, SEL, and other positive youth development practices. Needs assessments will help to identify the necessary supports, and partnerships will be leveraged to provide those services.

h. Juvenile crime prevention and rehabilitation programs.

Access to afterschool programs is crucial for keeping youth safe by fostering an environment where students can build SEL skills that will serve them throughout their lives. Studies⁸⁴ have found that students who participate in afterschool programs are less likely to engage in criminal activity and risky behavior,^{85,86} are more aware of the dangers of risky behavior, and show fewer signs of aggressive and problematic behaviors.

ACT Now works directly with Teen REACH, an afterschool program that has proven to keep youth safe and aid in preventing juvenile crime. They provide a safe environment with caring adult role models that work with youth to help them reach their full academic potential and develop skills that will help them in their future goals.

Comprehensive Community Based Youth Services (CCBYS) is a program run by ICOY that serves youth ages 11 to 17 at risk of involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, with an overarching goal of reunification and stabilization. According to performance outcomes, 96.3 percent of youth who participated in the program had no further involvement with the juvenile justice system during their time in the program. Support from the FSCS state scaling grant will allow ACT Now to connect more community schools to these supports.

The R3 program, signed into law by Governor J.B. Pritzker in 2019, funds grants for violence prevention, reentry, youth development, and other services in areas suffering from violence exacerbated by concentrated disinvestment. Investing in afterschool programs can support communities experiencing high poverty by providing working parents with child care. Afterschool programs decrease youths' likelihood to participate in substance use or criminal activity. ACT Now monitors the R3 grant program closely to advocate for its use by OST

programs and will help organizations leverage these funding sources to meet the needs of emerging and established community schools.

ACT Now receives funding through RPSA to provide technical assistance for grantees for youth-centered violence prevention services. ACT Now is one of three agencies providing coaching, support, and training to grantees. Grant dollars focus on three types of programming: Youth Services (e.g., OST programs), Violence Prevention, and Youth Intervention Services, as well as funding for Medicaid trauma recovery services.

ACT Now has developed a variety of trainings and technical assistance protocols to support violence prevention in youth development programs, including Peace Circles, Restorative Justice, Trauma-Informed Care, Cultural Competency, and Gender and Sexuality.

Within the Full-Service Community Schools state scaling grant, ACT Now and ISBE will build up and expand upon the services that are currently available, continuing to support high-impact programs that work to prevent juvenile crime and decrease risky behavior.

2. Reason for Selecting Proposed Services

Specific services to be provided at each full-service community school will be selected based on school-specific needs assessments to ensure that services and programs offered will meet the needs of the children and families in that school community. The inclusion of students, parents/guardians, and community members on Advisory Boards at each school will help to ensure that diverse perspectives are respected when choosing services. At the same time, based on research and current evidence, we expect some form of the outlined pipeline services to be offered at all schools. The research and rationale for these services are detailed in the sections above.

The services and training that we offer will be available to all schools identified for implementation, and certain offerings, such as the Coordinator Coaching cohort, will be required. We will require this participation because, as research has shown, community schools are more effective when evidence-based strategies are followed with fidelity. Offering coordinators the same training and tailored support around these evidence-based practices means full-service community schools will more likely see significant positive results.

3. Impact of Services on Academic Achievement

a. High-quality early childhood education programs.

Our collaborations with existing agencies and support to families with referrals and access to early childhood programs will positively impact academic achievement for our youngest learners. Participation in high-quality early childhood programs has been shown to significantly impact children's readiness for kindergarten, their overall trajectory in school and work,⁸⁷ and skills related to math or language.⁸⁸

b. High-quality school and out-of-school-time programs and strategies.

High-quality programming impacts academic achievement in multiple ways. Strong adult-student connections increase students' attendance and engagement in school. Intentional design of high-quality programs deepens understanding of academic concepts and allows students to learn through a variety of different types of projects and environments.

c. Support for a child's transition to elementary school, from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, and from high school into and through postsecondary education and into the workforce, including any comprehensive readiness assessment determined necessary.

High-impact tutoring directly impacts academic achievement, setting students up for greater likelihood of success as they transition from school-to-school.

d. Family and community engagement and supports, which may include engaging or supporting families at school or at home.

Parent/guardian workshops, family and community events, and other activities and services will help build positive connections between the school and parents and/or guardians as well as the surrounding community. Where trust exists between schools and families, adult family members feel more comfortable asking questions, supporting their children, and participating in decision making, which ultimately supports children's academic progress. Family nights to support academic learning will allow teachers to share with parents what their students are working on, helping parents support their children's schoolwork at home. Coordinators can also help adult family members to connect to adult education opportunities such as GED, computer skills, and ELL classes.

e. Activities that support postsecondary and workforce readiness, which may include job training, internship opportunities, and career counseling.

ACT Now's College and Career Readiness Guidebook and our partnership with 220 Youth Leadership will impact academic achievement by helping students identify future career goals and help programs tailor their classes and OST offerings.

f. Community-based support for students who have attended the schools in the area served by the pipeline, or students who are members of the community, facilitating their continued connection to the community and success in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Strong relationships with community partners and employment opportunities for alumni will increase attendance and engagement at school by helping students to feel safe and supported by their community. This indirectly impacts academic achievement.

g. Social, health, nutrition, and mental health services and supports.

Services that help students to feel safe, supported, and healthy, support academic attainment by positively impacting their overall well-being.⁸⁹ Physical health and nutrition services help reduce absenteeism as students' basic needs are met so that they can focus on learning. Mental health supports reduce behavioral issues, resulting in a calmer and safer classroom environment, positively impacting learning.

h. Juvenile crime prevention and rehabilitation programs.

Proven partner programs, such as Teen REACH, CCBYS, and R3, provide students with holistic programming to help them stay in school and out of the justice system. This directly impacts their ability to learn.

4. How Services will Address Annual Measurable Performance Objectives and Outcomes

We will increase enrollment in high-quality early childhood programs, such as Jump Start, to address Objective 1. Referrals to early childhood education programs and supports such as CCAP will help families access the many resources offered for early childhood in Illinois.

We will increase academic achievement (Objectives 2 and 3) by providing a variety of programs and services. High-impact tutoring will be offered to students most in need. High-quality OST programs, aligned to the Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards, will be offered at each school, with specific offerings selected based on needs assessments.

OST programs will also help to decrease chronic truancy and chronic absenteeism (Objective 4) by building positive relationships and raising students' levels of engagement and connection to schools. Programs that meet students' specific interests and needs can increase attendance by offering activities that students find particularly relevant.

Integrated student supports, provided through partnerships for needs such as healthcare, mental health services, housing, transportation, and other barriers to school achievement, will

indirectly impact academic achievement by ensuring that students are healthy, safe, and supported. Trainings provided by ACT Now, on topics such as trauma-informed care, will help practitioners meet the needs of their students and families.

The juvenile crime prevention strategies outlined above, such as Teen REACH programs, will help students to feel safe and supported as they avoid involvement in the justice system and pursue their interests and goals.

Family and community engagement strategies will increase parent/guardian involvement in, and connection to, the school communities, which will be reflected in improved results on the 5Essentials survey around family involvement (Objective 5). Involving adult family members on school based advisory boards and the statewide Steering Committee (Objective 7) will ensure that their perspectives impact decisions about programs, services, and strategies. Family events and programs will build relationships between families and staff, increase family members' capacity to support their students, and help them to attain their own educational and work goals, increasing their sense of self-efficacy and their connection to the school community.

Developing the community schools coordinator coaching cohort will address Objective 6 by offering at least 25 hours of training per year to community schools coordinators, building their capacity to develop and maintain the work of community schools with fidelity and confidence, aligning their work with the national Community Schools Standards and the Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards.

Objective 7 states that we will build out a statewide Steering Committee and create workgroups from that committee. Utilizing our deep and broad partnerships across the state in early childhood education, afterschool programs, juvenile crime prevention, family and

community engagement, and community partnerships, we will access a wide variety of stakeholders to bring into the committee, with the expertise to populate the workgroups needed.

C. The extent to which the services to be provided are focused on those with greatest need.

All work under this grant will be in service of students and families with the highest need. Schools eligible for Title I funding are already in need of more investment. The process for selecting specific schools to receive funding and support under this grant will be informed by data indicating which schools in each district are best positioned to take on this work and have the most need among students and families. The lead partner in each district can be the district itself or an intermediary lead partner agency, such as a community-based organization. We will weigh the following factors in identifying school districts with the most need: poverty rates; equity factors such as race and ethnicity; standardized test scores; Kindergarten readiness; graduation rates; chronic absenteeism; dropout rates; homelessness rates; unemployment rates; health indicators.

Within each partner school, advisory boards will meet regularly to discuss which students to prioritize for certain services, based on the highest need for academic and social-emotional supports, as well as enrichment opportunities. Needs assessments, including surveys and focus groups soliciting feedback from students, parents, and school staff, will add to school data to inform this process. At advisory board meetings, the results of these surveys, input from school staff, and academic, attendance, and disciplinary incident data, will inform program selection as well as which students to target for participation. Throughout the year, reviewing these same data categories will highlight any newly developing student needs.

VII. Adequacy of Resources

A. Plans to ensure that each full-service community school site has a full-time coordinator of pipeline services at such school

ACT Now is fully committed to providing adequate facilities and administrative support to aid in the successful implementation of the community schools model at all named partnering school districts. ACT Now will work with named local education agencies (LEAs) to establish roles, responsibilities, and authority appropriate for community schools coordinators. This collaboration will ensure that all entities involved in the project have clear expectations for this role. Each project's community schools coordinator will function as an intermediary for ACT Now and the LEA, as well as supervising the implementation of daily services at their respective sites. Having this community schools coordinator in place is a condition of the partnership laid out in the MOU. ACT Now will provide sample job descriptions and best practices in hiring to assist districts with filling these positions. Further, ACT Now will ensure these coordinators are high quality and supported through a community schools coordinator coaching process.

B. Plan to sustain the position beyond the grant period

Beyond the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) state scaling grant period, ACT Now intends to leverage one, or multiple, of the following funding streams to sustain the position of full-time coordinator of implemented pipeline services. The funding opportunities ACT Now anticipates using are consistent funding streams with opportunities for renewal following the grant period. Additionally, the service requirements for these grants align closely with that of FSCS state scaling grant.

ISBE's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) is one of the largest funding streams in the state and prioritizes serving students at low-achieving schools in high-poverty communities. This program supports agencies in creating community learning centers that provide supplemental academic support during OST.⁹⁰

The After School Programs grant, funded by ISBE, offers competitions to school districts and non-school districts (i.e., community organizations) for afterschool and OST programming. This grant was funded at a total of [REDACTED] for FY23, allocating [REDACTED] to school districts and [REDACTED] in competitive grants to community organizations. The purpose of this program is to improve academic outcomes for youth in a safe environment. Further, this program encourages the use of partnerships within funded communities to provide high-quality services and enrichment opportunities.⁹¹

The IDHS funds the Teen Responsibility, Education, Achievement, Caring, and Hope (Teen REACH) program, serving students ages six to 17 to prevent juvenile crime through afterschool programs.⁹²

IDHS, with the Illinois Office of Firearm Violence Prevention, is also funding Reimagine Public Safety Act (RPSA) grant opportunities for (a) violence prevention services, (b) youth development services, and (c) youth intervention.⁹³

ACT Now will lead in providing professional development opportunities to full-time coordinators and additional staff in managing, coordinating, and delivering pipeline services. ACT Now has extensive experience in developing and facilitating trainings for professionals within the youth development field in content areas such as: designing programming, assessing needs, administrative practices, implementation of specific content areas, and quality programming. In preparation for implementation of this project, ACT Now will design an onboarding protocol to include training for supervisory practices, strategies for successful program implementation, and the community schools model. Additionally, full-time coordinators and program staff will also have access to all training curricula available through the *Mizzen* by Mott app and ACT Now's Center for Afterschool Learning (ANCAL). *Mizzen* by Mott offers

readymade curriculum options for program providers, as well as templates for providers to build out their own successful curriculum. ANCAL includes a national database of over 1,000 online training videos which have all been thoroughly vetted and confirmed as high-quality learning opportunities. Trainings cover a wide scope of content areas, including logistics, program management, SEL learning, foreign language learning, and first aid/CPR, and are available to providers at no cost.

ACT Now also has a large community schools network spanning across the state. Currently, ACT Now provides trainings to these providers on a quarterly basis, covering topics similar to those above with a closer community schools lens. These trainings can also be leveraged in offering professional development for project staff. Further, ACT Now can collaborate with the community schools network to develop content and resources critical to the success of the model.

C. Plans for professional development

ACT Now plans to establish a statewide center for technical assistance, training, and support for community schools. This technical assistance will offer specialized and individualized support to identified districts and staff members that facilitate pipeline services.

1. Statewide and Regional Trainings

ACT Now is the statewide expert in training and technical assistance for community schools and has conducted this work for the past five years. We plan to expand these efforts through this project.

ACT Now will offer a statewide conference on community schools. This will serve to provide a training and networking opportunity for districts and partners identified in this grant and those that are already conducting community schools work.

This project will also provide for quarterly regional meetings in Chicago, the Chicago Suburbs, and Downstate Illinois. These meetings will provide training tailored to the stakeholders' needs in those areas and networking opportunities. These training opportunities will be available for identified districts, existing community schools, and districts and partners interested in learning about the community schools model.

ACT Now will also create an online selection of trainings and an online learning community for community schools in its existing online learning management system. This will enable trainees to earn certificates, track their training, and network with one another between in-person meetings.

Further, ACT Now will welcome community schools stakeholders into its suite of existing trainings and resources, including those on STEM, SEL, the Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards, Family Engagement, Cultural Competency, Needs Assessments and Asset Mapping, Building Partnerships, Grant Writing and Management, and much more.

2. Community School Coordinator Coaching

As part of this project, ACT Now will offer community schools coordinator coaching to all community schools coordinators identified by the schools in the partner LEAs. Community schools coordinators will meet monthly with training and networking opportunities covering the following topics: Needs Assessments and Asset Maps, Advisory Boards, Data Collection and Evaluation, Family and Community Engagement, and Community Organizing. We will also survey coordinators about training needs during the grant term and develop new trainings to respond to those needs.

The Community Schools Coordinator Coach will conduct monthly individual meetings with coordinators, as well as site visits as needed. This individualized coaching will provide one-on-one support that addresses the needs and concerns of specific schools and districts. All

community schools coordinators will identify yearly goals with their Coach, both professionally and for their school community. Throughout each school year, the Coach and community schools coordinator will track progress to each of the goals.

D. How this position will serve to plan, integrate, coordinate, and facilitate programs and services at each school

Community schools coordinators will be responsible for the day-to-day management and care of the facilities being used. Expectations for these services will be decided upon between shared entities listed in the MOU. To ensure programs are being run effectively and in a high-quality way, ACT Now will have a staff member dedicated to working with the full-time coordinators at each school to address program improvement, evaluation, assessment, reporting, and strategic planning on a consistent basis. Further, ACT Now staff will also visit facilities on a quarterly basis to monitor implementation efforts.

The full-time coordinator will be responsible for managing all services being provided. This will include identifying safe spaces within the school building for various programs, creating daily schedules, developing transition plans, communicating with caregivers and community members, and managing ongoing community partnerships. ACT Now staff will assist in developing a plan of coordinating services and offer support where needed.

Community schools coordinators will also be responsible for submitting periodic data to ACT Now to monitor implementation of activities and outcomes. Our evaluators will also utilize this data for the evaluation.

VII. Quality of the Management Plan

A. The extent to which the grantee has, or demonstrates a strong plan to have, a broadly representative consortium that reflects the needs of the community and its stakeholders, and a description of the roles and responsibilities of the broadly representative consortium outlined in the required preliminary MOU.

All the partners named in our preliminary Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) are fully committed to working together to expand community schools in Illinois statewide, regardless of changes in administration, leadership, or other unforeseeable factors.

Steering Committee: This project will include a Steering Committee to advise on the expansion of the community schools strategies statewide. This group will include community-based organizations, teacher unions, early childhood stakeholders, school districts, evaluation experts, ISBE, parents and youth, the Office of Firearm and Violence Prevention of the IDHS, and other state agencies that work with youth-serving entities. This group will advise on identifying districts to collaborate with statewide, on the finalized MOU, and on strategies to support districts. They will review evaluation data and provide advice on strategies for improvement. A list of tentative Steering Committee members can be found in *Appendix A*.

Identifying Districts: ACT Now, in partnership with ISBE and the statewide Steering Committee, will identify school districts with which to partner in this project, including the districts named in this proposal. This project aims to identify eight districts total, with at least two schools in each district covering the entire state of Illinois. The lead partner in each district can be the district itself or an intermediary lead partner agency such as a community-based organization. We will weigh the following factors in identifying school districts: poverty rates, equity factors such as race and ethnicity, standardized test scores, kindergarten readiness, graduation rates, chronic absenteeism, dropout rates, homelessness rates, unemployment rates, and health indicators.

District Services: Each school district will identify at least two schools in which to implement the community schools model. As partners, each school will receive [REDACTED] to implement the following services: hire a full-time community school coordinator; conduct a

community needs assessment and asset map; identify community partners and develop three MOUs; develop a community school advisory board for the school inclusive of, but not limited to, teachers, families, students, and community-based organizations; implement services in all four community schools pillar areas to address needs identified in the needs assessment. All school districts will receive community schools coordinator coaching, training, and technical assistance support in addition to the grant funding. School districts will also participate in statewide evaluation of the project and will monitor student outcomes and participation.

Technical Assistance and Training: ACT Now plans to establish a statewide center for technical assistance, training, and support for community schools. This technical assistance will offer specialized and individualized support to identified districts. However, ACT Now will also make available trainings and technical assistance to schools and community organizations statewide to expand the model. Further, ACT Now, in partnership with ISBE, will conduct outreach to districts and regional offices of education statewide in order to spread awareness about the value of the community schools model.

Statewide and Regional Trainings: ACT Now will offer a statewide conference on community schools. This will serve to provide a training and networking opportunity for districts and partners identified in this grant and those that are already conducting community schools work. Further, this conference will provide an opportunity for new districts to learn about the community schools model. This project will also provide for quarterly regional meetings available to districts in the state. These meetings will provide training tailored to the stakeholders needs in those areas and networking opportunities. ACT Now will also create an online selection of trainings and online learning community for community schools in its existing online learning management system. Further, ACT Now will welcome community schools stakeholders into its

suite of existing trainings. In addition, stakeholders will also have access to enriching and engaging curricula and resources through ACT Now.

Community Schools Coordinator Coaching: As part of this project, ACT Now will offer community schools coordinator coaching to all community schools coordinators identified by the schools in the partner school districts. Community coordinators will meet monthly with training and networking opportunities covering the following topics: Needs Assessments and Asset Maps, Advisory Boards, Data Collection and Evaluation, Family and Community Engagement, and Community Organizing. The Community Schools Coordinator Coach will also conduct monthly individual meetings with community schools coordinators and site visits as needed. All community schools coordinators will identify yearly goals with their Coach both professionally and for their school community.

Outreach to New Districts: In addition to supporting community schools implementation in the identified districts and supporting existing community schools, this project will also include outreach to districts statewide to spread awareness of the model and support in how to implement it through alternative funding sources. Further, ACT Now, in partnership with ISBE, will work to incorporate community schools into the state strategic plan, the state ESSA plan, and present this information to regional superintendents. ISBE will incorporate information about community schools throughout its communication with educators and districts. This project will include a statewide evaluation of implementing districts. We will use the data from the evaluation to present a report to the legislature, ISBE, and school districts to advocate for additional districts to adopt the model.

Evaluation: Throughout this project, ACT Now and ISBE will work with an independent evaluator to measure the success of this program. For further information on the evaluation, please see the *Quality of the Project Evaluation* section.

Roles and Responsibilities: ACT Now will serve as the project leader for this project. ACT Now will identify and recruit Steering Committee members, as well as facilitate and plan all Steering Committee meetings. ACT Now will also facilitate the process of identifying partner districts. ACT Now will then work with ISBE to publicize the opportunity and allow schools and community-based organizations to indicate their interest. ACT Now will also take the lead in communicating to districts and guiding them through the process of implementing the grant. ACT Now will also take the lead in offering technical assistance and support to community schools statewide.

ISBE, as the state education agency, agrees to fully support this project as indicated by their letter of support. This includes participating on the statewide Steering Committee. As a member of the Steering Committee, ISBE will help to publicize this opportunity to districts in Illinois. Further, ISBE will be involved in the development of selection criteria for identified districts and creating the final list of districts. ISBE will also assist where possible to provide data needed to measure the impact of the community schools work in Illinois. Moving forward, ISBE will contribute to sustaining this work by incorporating the community schools strategies in its strategic plan and other statewide initiatives as appropriate. ISBE will also work to incorporate community schools funding and resources to support community schools in its budget proposal to the governor. This will include funding lines that support the four pillars of the community schools strategy. Further, ISBE will use its role as an education leader to share the impact of the community schools model in order to build awareness throughout the state.

The Steering Committee will have periodic meetings to advise on several aspects of this project. The Steering Committee will review and approve selection criteria for school districts funded through this grant, as well as advise on which districts are selected for services under this grant. The Steering Committee will also review feedback surveys from the identified districts and advise on professional development and technical assistance needs of the community schools field.

Each school must have a full-time community schools coordinator at each school. This community schools coordinator must fully participate in the community schools coordinator coaching cohort. As part of their community schools work, all school districts must have a community needs assessment and asset map. Districts must identify community partners and develop three MOUs. Moreover, districts must develop a community schools advisory board for the school inclusive of, but not limited to, teachers, families, students, and community-based organizations. Through the grant term, districts must implement services in all four community schools pillar areas that address the needs identified in the needs assessment and report these activities to ACT Now. Further, districts must participate in data collection for a statewide evaluation. Districts are also responsible for fiscal reporting of funds used in this grant.

B. The extent to which the applicant demonstrates a history of effectiveness in working with a diverse range of stakeholders, including students and families.

Overview of ACT Now: Afterschool for Children and Teens Now (ACT Now) is a statewide organization that advocates for quality and affordable afterschool programs and community schools. We serve a variety of (a) programs that operate before and after school, weekends, summer, and school holidays; (b) programs that support students throughout the school day with additional services; (c) and programs that offer enrichment, academic support, recreation, social and emotional support, and clinical care. ACT Now focuses on five program

areas: policy and advocacy, quality improvement, professional development, STEM education, and community schools. We have robust trainings and resources in all of these areas.

ACT Now is a fiscally sponsored organization. Our fiscal sponsor is the non-profit organization Metropolitan Family Services (MFS). Our organization is also the C.S. Mott Foundation funded statewide afterschool network in Illinois and has a counterpart in all 50 states. This network provides us access to national afterschool leaders, trainings, curriculum, and technical assistance that we can leverage to connect to youth development programs in Illinois. ACT Now is also a member of the statewide coalitions workgroup with the National Coalition for Community Schools and uses this network to share community schools best practices nationwide.

Community Schools Guiding Team: ACT Now created a Community Schools Guiding Team to advise in its work on implementing community schools statewide. This group makes decisions about professional development opportunities, advocacy strategies, and the investment of other resources and supports. We will leverage this group to start a steering committee.

Overview of ISBE: The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has used community schools strategies to meet the full needs of students and families and seeks to expand this model throughout the state. ISBE has leveraged community schools in its response to the pandemic. Community schools are a part of the state's learning renewal plan. Further, ISBE invested [REDACTED] from federal pandemic relief funds into the Community Partnership grant, which requires that the recipients follow the four pillars of the community schools model.

Participating School Districts: School districts throughout Illinois have been working on the community schools model for decades, sometimes with substantial funding devoted to this work and sometimes with no additional funding specifically for community schools. We seek to

work with school districts to establish, grow, and formalize community schools practices in Illinois in order to improve student outcomes. We will ensure that all the school districts we identify will have the staff and infrastructure needed to implement this project.

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

ACT Now has a history of implementing both public and private grants with fidelity, meeting all project deliverables and reporting requirements, and having fiscally sound practices. Above, we have listed roles and responsibilities for all involved parties. A full project timeline can be found below.

Year One	
January to March	Recruit Steering Committee members; Hire new ACT Now staff for the project; Research factors for identified districts’ application; Finalize district interest form with the Steering Committee; Monthly Steering Committee meetings
April to June	Release interest form to the field for funding; Review submissions; Develop community schools coordinator coaching model; Monthly Steering Committee meetings
July to September	Issue award agreements to the field; Begin community schools coordinator coaching; Begin regional community schools training and networking events; Review professional development priorities with the Steering Committee and solicit feedback; Monthly Steering Committee meetings; Finalize MOU
October to December	Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Monthly Steering Committee meetings
Year Two and Three Will Follow the Same Workplan	
January to March	Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings
April to June	Gather feedback from the field on professional development need; Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings
July to September	Gather evaluation data from identified districts; Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings
October to December	Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings; Outreach to school districts to encourage them to adopt the

	model and share lessons learned and effectiveness data from previous year; Issue progress report
Year Four	
January through March	Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings
April to June	Gather feedback from the field on professional development need; Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings
July to September	Gather evaluation data from identified districts; Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings
October to December	Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings; Outreach to school districts to encourage them to adopt the model and share lessons learned and effectiveness data from previous year; Issue progress report; Hold statewide conference on community schools
Year Five	
January through March	Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings; Draft detailed project sustainability plan
April to June	Gather feedback from the field on professional development need; Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings; Meet with districts to develop individual sustainability plans
July to September	Gather evaluation data from identified districts; Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings; Meet with districts to develop individual sustainability plans
October to December	Develop and disseminate report on the effectiveness of the community schools model to superintendents and the General Assembly; Community schools coordinator coaching sessions monthly; Quarterly regional community schools training and networking event; Quarterly Steering Committee meetings

IX. Quality of the Project Evaluation

A. The extent to which the methods of evaluation are thorough, feasible, and appropriate to the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the proposed project.

Our annual measurable performance objectives are designed to meet the stated broad goals of ensuring that children are (i) prepared for kindergarten, (ii) achieving academically, and (iii) safe, healthy, and supported by engaged adult family members. We use the term adult family

members instead of parents in order to be inclusive of the many adults that can have caregiving roles in children's lives.

Objective 1: In participating school communities, ensure that at least 50 percent of children are ready for kindergarten, as indicated by Illinois KIDS data and the Erikson Institute's Risk and Reach Report. Once baseline is established, we expect to grow 10 percent from the established baseline in each year of the grant (e.g., if baseline is 30 percent, our year 1 goal will be 33 percent).

Objective 2a: In schools served under the grant, increase academic achievement such that 50 percent of students meet or exceed their English Language Arts (ELA) achievement rates by the end of the five-year term as measured by the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). Once baseline is established, we expect to grow 10 percent from the established ELA achievement baseline in each year of the grant (e.g., if baseline is 30 percent, our year 1 goal will be 33 percent).

Objective 2b: In schools served under the grant, increase academic achievement such that 50 percent of students meet or exceed their math achievement rates by the end of the five-year term as measured by the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). Once baseline is established, we expect to grow 10 percent from the established math achievement baseline in each year of the grant (e.g., if baseline is 30 percent, our year 1 goal will be 33 percent).

Objective 3a: In schools served under the grant, increase academic achievement such that 50 percent of students meet or exceed their target growth rate in English Language Arts (ELA) by the end of the five-year term as measured by the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). Once baseline is established, we expect to grow 10 percent from the established ELA growth rate

baseline in each year of the grant (e.g., if baseline is 30 percent, our year 1 goal will be 33 percent).

Objective 3b: In schools served under the grant, increase academic achievement such that 50 percent of students meet or exceed their target growth rate in math by the end of the five-year term as measured by the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). Once baseline is established, we expect to grow 10 percent from the established math growth rate achievement baseline in each year of the grant (e.g., if baseline is 30 percent, our year 1 goal will be 33 percent).

Objective 4: In schools served under the grant, decrease chronic truancy and chronic absenteeism by at least 10 percent, as indicated from data provided by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Once baseline is established, decrease chronic truancy and chronic absenteeism by two percent of baseline each year of the grant cycle. This contributes to engagement in school as well as a positive school climate and leads to improved academic achievement. Lower rates of suspensions and other behavior referrals are also indicative of a positive school climate; this data will be collected from the schools.

Objective 5: In schools served under the grant, increase positive results on the 5Essentials survey, especially around family involvement, leading to all schools in the grant being rated as “organized” or “well-organized” by the end of the five-year term. Once baseline is established, increase parent response rate to the 5Essentials survey by three percent of baseline each year of the grant cycle. This indicates a more positive school climate with engaged adult family members, contributing to all the overarching goals listed above.

Objective 6: As the collaborative entity for community schools in Illinois, develop a support hub for full-service community schools to train community schools coordinators and provide technical assistance and support for full-service community schools across the state. All

community schools coordinators in schools served under this grant will attend at least 25 hours of ACT Now training annually. As a result of participation in training, and based on surveys and qualitative data, at least 90 percent of community schools coordinators working in schools under this grant will feel confident implementing the full-service community schools model. Once baseline is established, we expect to increase the percentage of community schools coordinators indicating confidence in implementation by 10 percent of the baseline each year of the grant. Anticipated outcomes include building relationships with students, family, school staff and partners, developing and maintaining effective advisory boards, building and sustaining meaningful partnerships with community organizations, and aligning with the Community Schools Standards and the Illinois Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards.

Objective 7: ACT Now will develop a statewide Steering Committee for community schools with participation from at least 10 stakeholder groups in each year of the grant. The Steering Committee will leverage work groups to focus on aspects such as evaluation, implementation, health and wellness, family engagement, etc.

1. Evaluation Personnel

This evaluation will be conducted by Planning, Implementation & Evaluation (PIE) Org., with some evaluation activities performed by community schools coordinators and ACT Now staff. PIE is a Chicago-area nonprofit that specializes in evaluation, strategic, and capacity-building for schools, nonprofits, and foundations. PIE has proven success in evaluating Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) programs through its collaboration with West Chicago Elementary School District 33 and Skokie/Morton Grove School District 69 on Full-Service Community School grants. Additionally, PIE has a long relationship with the Carole Robertson Center for Learning as an evaluation partner for their OST programs, which is aligned to the

Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities FSCS pillar. PIE has a history of conducting rigorous, quasi-experimental educational evaluation across the state of Illinois, particularly through projects intended to impact literacy and early learning for youth, and has a demonstrated history of producing timely, usable formative and summative data to support program improvements and accountability in service of maximized student and community impact. Specifically in the rural context, PIE is the external evaluator for a statewide Illinois program including over 10 rural community-based health organizations.

PIE will provide oversight of all data collection, analysis, and reporting for this grant. They will also provide training to community schools coordinators and ACT Now staff, including coaches, to conduct evaluation activities such as surveys, focus groups, and other appropriate activities. This will build capacity for evaluation work at the school level, contributing to long term sustainability and ensuring that staff at all schools funded under this grant are following best practices and protocols for the most accurate evaluation data. As community schools coordinators will build relationships with students and families at their schools, they may be able to achieve higher participation rates in these activities. This will also contribute to our efforts to scale community schools statewide, as this first cohort of coordinators and coaches may then have capacity to support others in evaluating their work using these consistent practices.

2. Evaluation Design

This evaluation will utilize a quasi-experimental, retrospective pre/post, mixed methods design which will establish a baseline in year one and will incorporate both formative and summative components throughout the lifetime of the program. See *Table A* below for an overview of methods which are detailed further in the following sections.

a. Baseline Data Collection

The Evaluation Team will conduct a baseline evaluation across all treatment variables in Year 1 of the program. Descriptive analysis will provide an overview of each partner school, including metrics of academic achievement, attendance, discipline, demographic characteristics, and other key variables aligned to the program objectives. The baseline analysis will be a key input for the needs assessment process as well as establishing quantitative goals for each of the identified program objectives. Also, it will provide the foundation for the quasi-experimental design and regression discontinuity methods described below including the selection of “Near Peer” comparison schools.

b. Quasi-experimental design

Quasi-experimental design will be conducted via regression discontinuity methodology. Regression discontinuity methods are considered strong quasi-experimental designs that look at treatment variables (i.e., standardized assessment data aligned to the annual performance objectives) trend lines before intervention and after intervention—with changes in trend lines being cautiously, but causally attributed to the intervention (i.e., FSCS). As mentioned above, baseline data will inform the selection of multiple matched comparisons from which to further inspect trend line causality of the intervention. For example, all intervention schools will be compared to their within-district peer schools who did not receive the FSCS intervention (i.e., “District Comparison”). Furthermore, the evaluation team will do propensity score matching for each treatment school based on school demographics and the treatment variables, to identify a sample of schools across the state with similar demographics and performance for each school. These schools will be considered “Near Peer” comparison schools for that specific treatment school. Each treatment school will have its own set of “Near Peer” comparisons. As a result, the trend lines of intervention variables of treatment schools will be compared in three ways: (1) based on the previous, historical trends of the treatment school, (2) to “District comparisons”,

and (3) to “Near Peer” comparisons. Linear regression will be run on all intervention variables for the treatment schools and their comparisons to determine the statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) of the R-value of the trend lines, as well as the practical effects of the intervention, via r^2 values.

c. Retrospective Pre/Post.

Parent and teacher surveys will utilize a mixed-methods retrospective pre/post design. Retrospective survey design asks respondents at the end of an intervention to reflect on the intervention and respond about their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention. Retrospective surveys mitigate response shift bias, a well-documented phenomenon in which participants’ pretest responses are often higher estimates than their actual ability because they have not yet been exposed to an intervention.⁹⁴ That is, participants “don’t know what they don’t know”, and therefore posttest results are lower than pretest results because participants gained knowledge during the intervention. Research shows that retrospective surveys are a valid way to measure interventions and mitigate response shift bias across multiple programs and contexts.^{95,96,97,98,99} Matched t-tests on responses to surveys will be analyzed at the $p < 0.05$ level to determine the impact of FSCS intervention on parent/student knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

d. Mixed-Methods.

Across both parent and teacher evaluation work, a mixed-methods approach will integrate qualitative focus groups and pair them with both objective data and participation rates, such that the program team understands how students and parents perceive the impact and implementation of these services. A purposive, representative sample of teachers and parents will be selected for focus groups, specific to each service and opportunity outlined in the grant. Community schools coordinators will be trained in focus group and interview evaluation as a component of ongoing evaluation efforts and to assist with data collection. Integrating multiple methods within an

evaluation design seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, and clarification of the results from one method with the results from the other methods, all to increase meaningfulness.¹⁰⁰ Multiple methods also emphasize complementarity, which is an analysis approach that plans for results to be inconsistent and contradictions to be found, allowing for meaningful propositions about the program to be made.¹⁰¹ For example, it may be possible that a very popular program with high satisfaction results is not effective at meeting outcomes. By using multiple methods, the evaluation will be able to identify how to improve the program to maximize impact for students and parents. That is, all quantitative and qualitative data will be triangulated to ensure a robust and nuanced understanding of program implementation and impact.

3. Formative Evaluation

The evaluation team will meet regularly with the program team, which will include representatives from ACT Now and the Steering Committee Evaluation Work Group, to review data and monitor evaluation and program processes (monthly in Year 1 and quarterly in Years 2-5). The evaluation team will focus on creating data processes such as a live dashboard to display data on metrics such as attendance rates, discipline data, participation data, etc. Twice a year, the evaluation team will engage in formal continuous quality improvement cycles (CQI). The spring CQI cycle will focus on output and qualitative data, seeking to understand implementation and make process improvements. The fall CQI cycle will be a full data walk exploring all quantitative and qualitative outcomes and process data collected in the summative evaluation cycle. Action plans from each CQI cycle will be continually referred to in the next set of Steering Committee meetings and CQI cycles to ensure accountability.

4. Summative Evaluation

At the end of the year, a formal summative evaluation report will be created and disseminated to the program team. The program team, due to monthly or quarterly meetings and

CQI reviews, will likely be fully briefed and prepared for the findings in the report; all stakeholders will be able to iteratively provide feedback and edits to the report such that there is consensus across the team about the findings, hypotheses around these findings, and their implications. According to the dissemination plan (detailed in *section c*) proper steps for public dissemination and discussion will also be implemented at this time. The report will be completed by the Fall of the next school year (i.e., November 2024 for the 2023-2024 school year).

B. The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.

Table A below outlines each objective of the grant, the data source for progress assessment, a timeline of data collection, the preliminary impact goal (subject to change based on baseline data), and additional supporting indicators. Additionally, where schools and/or districts are already collecting parallel data for other programs and/or grants, we will utilize any existing data to avoid duplicating efforts.

Table A: Outcome Alignment of Evaluation¹⁰²

Proposal Objective	Goal & Competitive Priorities	Data Source	Timeline	Impact Goal
Objective 1: Kindergarten Readiness	i, CP1, IP	Illinois KIDS data, Erikson Institute’s Risk and Reach Report, & Referrals to early childhood programs and supports such as CCAP	Annually	By end of 5 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50 percent ready for Kindergarten (increased by 10 percent of established baseline annually)
Objective 2a: Academic Achievement in ELA	ii	Illinois Assessment of Readiness	Annually	By end of 5 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50 percent meet or exceed ELA achievement rates (increased by 10

Objective 2b: Academic Achievement in Math				<p>percent of established baseline annually)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 50 percent meet or exceed math achievement rates (increased by 10 percent of established baseline annually)
Objective 3a: Academic Growth in ELA Objective 3b: Academic Growth in Math	ii	Illinois Assessment of Readiness	Annually	<p>By end of 5 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 50 percent meet or exceed ELA target growth rates (increased by 10 percent of established baseline annually) ● 50 percent meet or exceed math target growth rates (increased by 10 percent of established baseline annually)
Objective 4: Decrease Chronic Truancy and Absenteeism	i, ii	ISBE attendance data & School discipline data	Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decreased chronic truancy and absenteeism by at least 10 percent (decrease by two percent from baseline annually) ● Lower rates of suspensions and referrals

Objective 5: Positive School Climate	iii, CP1	5Essentials survey data & Parent/Teacher focus groups	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family involvement in committees/other school events ● All schools rated as “organized” or “well-organized” (Increase response rate of 5Essentials by three percent annually)
Objective 6: Support hub for FSCS training and TA	i, ii, iii, CP2	Training participation hours & community schools coordinator surveys	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 25 hours of ACT Now training annually for community schools coordinators ● 90 percent of community schools coordinators feel confident implementing FSCS model (Increase confidence by 10 percent annually)
Objective 7: Statewide FSCS Steering Committee	CP2	Steering Committee Participation	Monthly (Y1) or Quarterly (Y2-Y5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 10 stakeholder groups represented

By using multiple methods, the evaluation will be able to identify how to improve the program to maximize impact for students and parents. That is, all quantitative and qualitative data will be triangulated to ensure a robust and nuanced understanding of program implementation and impact.

The evaluation team will meet regularly with representatives from ACT Now and the Steering Committee Evaluation Work Group to review data and monitor evaluation and program processes (monthly in Year 1 and quarterly in Years 2-5). The evaluation team will prioritize building data literacy and critical analysis skills among the Steering Committee members. The committee will review the data at each meeting to ensure that there are no “surprises,” and gain capacity to use formative evaluation data to tweak implementation to ensure maximization of student and family outcomes in real time. Twice a year, the evaluation team will engage in formal continuous quality improvement cycles (CQI) with ACT Now, the Steering Committee, Evaluation Workgroup, and other key stakeholders to review data and make specific action plans to improve implementation and impact. The spring CQI cycle will focus on output and qualitative data, seeking to understand implementation and make process improvements. The fall CQI cycle will be a full data walk exploring all quantitative and qualitative outcomes and process data collected in the summative evaluation cycle. Action plans from each CQI cycle will be continually referred to in the next set of Steering Committee meetings and CQI cycles to ensure accountability.

At the end of the year, a formal summative evaluation report will be created and disseminated to the program team. The report will be completed by the Fall of the next school year (i.e., November 2024 for the 2023-2024 school year).

C. The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide valid and reliable performance data on relevant outcomes.

PIE will provide oversight of all data collection, analysis, and reporting for this grant. They will also provide training to community schools coordinators and ACT Now staff, including coaches, to conduct evaluation activities such as surveys, focus groups, and other appropriate activities. This will build capacity for evaluation work at the school level,

contributing to long term sustainability and ensuring that staff at all schools funded under this grant are following best practices and protocols for the most accurate evaluation data. As coordinators will build relationships with students and families at their schools, they may be able to achieve higher participation rates in these activities. This will also contribute to our efforts to scale community schools statewide, as this first cohort of coordinators and coaches may then have capacity to support others in evaluating their work using these consistent practices.

This evaluation will utilize a quasi-experimental, retrospective pre/post, mixed methods design with both formative and summative components. Quasi-experimental design will be conducted via regression discontinuity methodology. Parent and teacher surveys will utilize a mixed-methods retrospective pre/post design. Across both parent and teacher evaluation work, a mixed-methods approach will integrate qualitative focus groups and pair them with both objective data and participation rates, such that the program team understands how students and parents perceive the impact and implementation of these services. By using multiple methods, the evaluation will be able to identify how to improve the program to maximize impact for students and parents. That is, all quantitative and qualitative data will be triangulated to ensure a robust and nuanced understanding of program implementation and impact.

We will collect data on a variety of indicators, including the following, as required by this application, in order to assess our progress toward program objectives: student chronic absenteeism rates; student discipline rates; including suspensions and expulsions; school climate information, which may come from student, parent, or teacher surveys; provision of integrated student supports and stakeholder services; expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities; family and community engagement efforts and impact; information on the number, qualifications, and retention of school staff, including the number and percentage of fully

certified teachers, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, rates of teacher turnover, and teacher experience; graduation rates; changes in school spending information; collaborative leadership and practice strategies, which may include building the capacity of educators, principals, other school leaders, and other staff to lead collaborative school improvement structures, such as professional learning communities, and regularly convening or engaging all initiative-level partners, such as LEA representatives, city or county officials, children's and youth's cabinets, nonprofit service providers, public housing agencies, and advocates.

All metrics directly related to activities within pipeline services are outlined further in *Appendix B*. This table outlines every data source for this evaluation, provides a general description of the data sources (e.g., MOUs, attendance, etc.), provides a timeline for data collection, and aligns each source to the specific objectives of this grant. Additionally, where schools and/or districts are already collecting parallel data for other programs and/or grants, we will utilize any existing data to avoid duplicating efforts.

1. Data Analysis

All survey data will be entered consistently throughout the school year and summer by community schools coordinators and program staff, such that progress can be effectively monitored at evaluation meetings and any issues addressed quickly. All survey and focus group analyses will be conducted one month after data collection. PIE will lead the analyses in partnership with ACT Now staff and the community schools coordinators to support ongoing capacity development of evaluation efforts. This will allow the evaluation team and program staff to understand issues, quickly and efficiently, within program implementation and impact, such that course corrections can be made to support students and families. ISBE will provide ACT Now and PIE school level data (i.e., chronic absenteeism, IAR) on a quarterly basis. PIE will create an automatically refreshable dashboard in which quarterly analysis of school-level

data will be conducted for formative evaluation and CQI purpose. An annual analysis of summative trend-line analysis, described in the quasi-experimental design section, will be conducted annually in the fall of the following school year (November 2024 for the 2023-2024 school year). *Table A* shows the frequency of data collection and analysis across each grant year.

2. Data Management

All formative and summative evaluation data will be stored in a password protected database. All quantitative data will be housed in a database system with privacy controls (such as HIPPA and FERPA certification) that will be selected by PIE and ACT Now, with approval from ISBE. This database will be the main data entry point for all program attendance and participation data across the district. Only selected personnel will have direct access to personally identifiable information, which will link student data to participation in Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) state scaling grant-funded activities. The database will have multiple privacy protections in place to ensure staff have access only to the data that is relevant to their work. All data will be reported at an aggregated level and no personally identifiable information will be shared publicly.

3. Dissemination Plan

Findings from the annual summative evaluation will be shared with the program team, Steering Committee, ISBE, and community partners through an annual reflection and data-walk session as per the CQI plan outlined above. The PIE evaluation team and Steering Committee Evaluation Workgroup, together with community schools coordinators and school leadership, will facilitate discussions on what the data means for programs and partners and for planning forward for the following year. In addition, the community schools team will share evaluation findings as relevant with school district administration. A final report that provides an overview

of the full course of the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) state scaling grant will be compiled and reported by January following the end of the grant (i.e., January 2028).

X. Strategy to Scale

ACT Now serves districts and community partners in low-income communities. We provide assurance to the U.S. Department of Education that all of our partners will focus services on schools eligible for a schoolwide program under section 1114(b) of the ESEA.

ACT Now has worked for the past five years to expand community schools in Illinois. We have the infrastructure and supports in place to immediately put into effect the goals of the Full-Service Community Schools state scaling grant. This grant will provide us the seed funding to invest in new community schools around the state. We will be able to use the data collected through this project to provide the evidence base for school districts, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and legislature to expand funding for community schools in Illinois. Further, our organization is skilled in blending and braiding current funding sources to support the four pillars of the community schools model. We have plans in place to leverage existing state funds to sustain the community schools model in our identified districts, which we have broken down by the four pillars below.

Integrated Student Supports: ACT Now plans to leverage a variety of supports to help districts to continue to maintain integrated student supports after the grant period. ISBE has used some of its Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to develop Social Emotional Learning (SEL) support hubs throughout the state.¹⁰³ Districts can leverage this resource to seek trauma and mental health training and supports for their district. Further, the Restore, Reinvest, Renew (R3) grant in Illinois covers a large range of service areas, such as violence prevention, reentry, youth development, economic development, and civil legal aid

services.¹⁰⁴ These services could help to meet identified needs in student populations and in family and community members. Finally, the Reimagine Public Safety Act (RPSA) funding in Illinois also funds violence prevention services and mental health supports, which again may serve the identified needs of certain communities.¹⁰⁵

In addition to these existing programs and funding sources that can support the integrated student supports needed in community schools, ACT Now has a centralized repository of trainings and resources to support the internal development of student supports for districts and community-based organizations. Further, ACT Now has a database of community partners statewide to which we can refer community school stakeholders for collaboration.

Expanded Learning Time: The federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program funds OST programming in Illinois and can be used for a variety of afterschool and summer learning experiences. Further, Illinois uses state funds to grant the Teen REACH program, which funds OST programming for youth ages six to 17. The R3 and RPSA grants mentioned above also have allowable uses for youth development, which includes OST programs. ISBE also has an After School Programs grant available to school districts and non-profit entities. ACT Now has vast experience in helping to coach programs in applying for these grants and can help districts in Illinois explore this opportunity before and after the project period. Further, we have also built a capacity building website, which is consistently updated with funding opportunities and grant writing resources to assist programs in this work.¹⁰⁶

Family and Community Engagement: ACT Now plans to harness existing investments in Family and Community Engagement in Illinois, as well as the infrastructure built during this grant period, to scale and sustain Family and Community Engagement in the state. Illinois uses state funding to fund the Parent Mentor Program.¹⁰⁷ Parent Mentors help fill persistent equity

gaps by volunteering in classrooms for two hours per day for at least 100 hours. The Parent Mentors are supported by weekly training on classroom instructional practices and leadership training. As a result, they support each other to pursue their goals and unite the school community for long term change. In addition, after 100 participation hours, parents receive a stipend for their time. Programs such as this can serve to promote academic achievement as well and family and community engagement.

Further, some OST funding sources also allow for funding to be spent on family and community engagement, such as 21st CCLC, Teen REACH, and ISBE's After School Programs grant. ACT Now has developed resources, toolkits, and trainings that help programs to use existing programmatic initiatives and funding sources to engage family and community partners through these types of programs. In addition, districts are given access to family engagement funding through Title IV Part B in ESEA.¹⁰⁸ We can also coach districts in using this funding to support family and community engagement in the community schools model.

Collaborative Leadership Practices: The largest asset to assist in sustaining collaborative leadership practices will be the examples of successful practices from grantees and the infrastructure for collaboration that those grantees have built in their communities. Once identified districts have taken the time to develop advisory boards, plans for collaboration, and new partnerships through this grant, they will have the infrastructure in place to continue this work after the grant period. These successful models of collaboration and examples of successful partnerships will also be instructional to new districts that begin this work.

Through our community schools coordinator coaching process, we will develop templates and trainings to support districts in establishing the community schools model. We will record these trainings and have the instructional sessions and resources developed available to

additional districts that choose to pursue this model. Further, we will have a cohort of community schools coordinators that have been through this process and can be leveraged as coaches to support additional districts in the state through a mentorship model.

State Community Schools Funding: In addition to the funding sources, partnerships, resources, and supports explained above to support the expansion of community schools beyond this grant period, Illinois is also pursuing state dedicated funding for community schools. ISBE proposed funding for community schools in 2020 that was not funded by the legislature. One of the current stumbling blocks that exists in executing such a program is that no statewide model has yet been created. Currently, community schools leverage a variety of different sources and gather a variety of data on impact. This disjointed field makes it difficult to prove the impact of the work statewide. Through this Full-Service Community Schools state scaling grant, we aim to build a cohesive model for community schools that will show its effectiveness through an independent evaluation. This initiative will lay the groundwork for state funding to sustain and continue scaling this work through a state funding line for community schools. The letters of support from legislators and ISBE show the support for this commitment after the grant period.

Steering Committee and Technical Assistance: ACT Now plans to leverage some of the infrastructure built during this grant period to continue to sustain this work after the end of the grant term, such as the agendas and workplan established for the Steering Committee and resources and trainings created during this grant. Further, ACT Now plans to leverage any state funding supporting community schools to also support the technical assistance to these programs. Finally, we plan to try to institutionalize some of these supports in school districts, so they can also provide this support after the grant period.

Scaling Community Schools in Illinois: ACT Now was extremely intentional about the number of target districts and schools to serve under this grant. We seek to serve eight districts with two schools per district. Our partners decided not to pursue a percentage of schools and districts in our project because Illinois is a state with over 800 school districts. Given the size and scale of some districts in Illinois, a percentage of districts and schools may not be feasible or actually meet our project needs. We seek to work with eight school districts to have a foothold in each part of the state. Those districts will be used as strategic test cases to inspire other local districts to use the model.

Outside of the districts in which we will be supporting the full-scale implementation of community schools, we plan, both during the grant period and after, to work with districts not funded through this grant to support their adoption of the community schools model. We will use the training, technical assistance, examples of partnerships and success stories, and evaluation data to show other districts the effectiveness of this model and help them navigate its adoption. Finally, we will support them in braiding the state resources mentioned above to support their community schools work.

History of Collaboration: ACT Now has a strong history of collaboration. We are a statewide coalition of over 2,500 members from community organizations, school districts, state agencies, business leaders, policymakers, and advocates. We have a strong record of leveraging these partnerships to make an impact for the field. We will leverage these connections to support and sustain the work of community schools in Illinois.

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In column Goal & Competitive Priority Priorities, we indicate which objective(s) the proposed service will address. Roman numerals i, ii, and iii refer to the three overarching goals stated in the application: (i) prepared for kindergarten, (ii) achieving academically, and (iii) Safe, healthy, and supported by engaged adults. Competitive and Invitation priorities are referred to as: CP1, CP2, and IP: (CP1) SEL, (CP2) Cross-Agency Coordination and Community Engagement for Systemic Change, (IP) Effective Transition from PK-K3.

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