

Systems for Training and Retaining Our Natchitoches Educators for Growth

(STRONG)

Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program Grant

Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

A. Need for Project (20 points) 2

 (i) Identifying & addressing gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities .. 2

 (ii) Build on similar efforts to improve relevant outcomes using existing funding streams..... 4

 (iii) Part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning 6

 (iv) Address the needs of the target population or other identified needs 8

B. Quality of the Project Design (25 points)..... 9

 (i) Demonstrates a rationale 9

 (ii) Relevant literature review, project implementation plan, and appropriate methods 11

 (iii) Methods of evaluation provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment... 22

C. Quality of the Management Plan (25 points)..... 25

D. Adequacy of Resources (30 points)..... 30

 (i) The likelihood that the proposed project will result in system change or improvement 30

 (ii) Build local capacity that address the needs of the target population 31

 (iii) Resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant 32

Introduction

Nestled between the major municipalities of Shreveport and Alexandria, Natchitoches is a small, remote city with over 80% of the population coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Natchitoches Parish School District includes 13 schools, 11 of which meet the high-need criteria (Appendix E). Over 90% of the students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and more than 60% belong to ethnic minority groups. High teacher turnover and principal attrition are prevalent in the district, particularly in the high-need schools where the majority of novice teachers are assigned. Moreover, Natchitoches Parish faces competition from neighboring districts that offer some of the highest teacher salaries in the state (Louisiana Department of Education [LDOE], 2023c). To address these challenges, Natchitoches Parish is applying for a Teacher and School Leader Incentive Fund grant. This grant will be utilized to enhance the district's human capital management system (HCMS), ensuring equitable educational opportunities by providing all students with access to qualified and effective educators. The grant will have a direct impact on 13 schools serving 5,003 students, 427 teachers, and 22 school leaders. Eleven of these schools meet the high-need criteria (Absolutely Priority 2).

Our proposal, Systems for Training and Retaining Our Natchitoches Educators for Growth (STRONG) prioritizes four research-based school-level strategies that form the foundation of the TAP System and a fifth strategy at the district level: 1) implement evaluation processes using valid and reliable rubrics for teachers and school leaders, 2) create formal teacher leadership positions for teachers with strong instructional skills, 3) establish collaborative and relevant professional learning for teachers and school leaders, 4) implement a performance-based compensation system for teachers and school leaders, and 5) develop a vision for

enhancing the HCMS districtwide (Absolute Priority 1). These strategies provide a strong base for the district to build capacity within school leadership teams to more effectively implement sustainable character education strategies and to better train and support new teachers - two areas that will be prioritized during the implementation of this grant. Project STRONG will yield a sustainable model for attracting, developing, and retaining a well-qualified, experienced, effective, and diverse pool of educators who are prepared to teach diverse groups of learners, as well as of highly skilled and effective school leaders who are prepared to support these teachers (Competitive Preference Priority 1; Competitive Preference Priority 2).

Natchitoches Parish School District is committed to equipping and empowering its educators and students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources needed to be successful in and out of the classroom, and, as a result, seeks this TSL grant, in partnership with the nonprofit the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), to build on initial efforts.

A. Need for Project (20 points)

(i) Identifying & addressing gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities

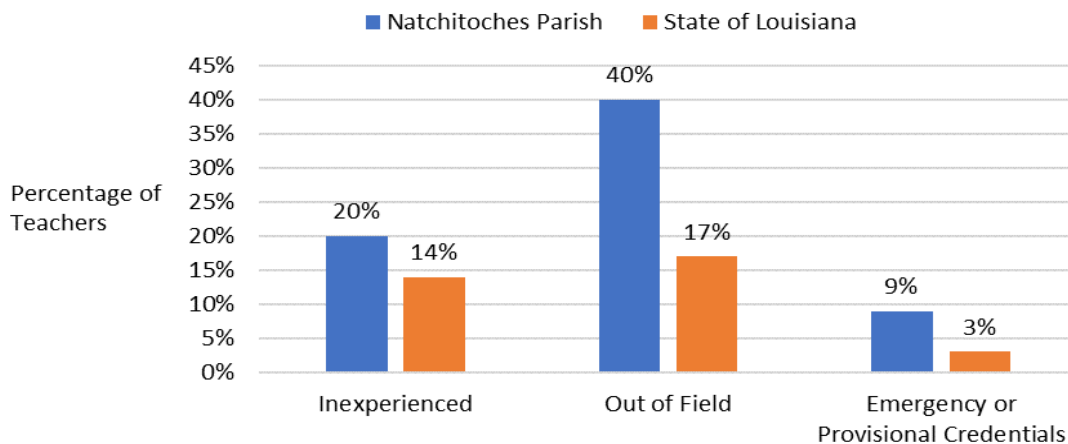
Research consistently emphasizes the significant impact of teachers and school leaders on student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Lee & Mamerow, 2019). However, the Natchitoches Parish School District's high educator turnover depletes resources and hampers the establishment of a high-performing, stable educator workforce. As a remote district that serves historically underserved student populations, Natchitoches Parish struggles to attract and retain effective teachers and school leaders, a challenge commonly encountered by schools with high poverty rates nationwide (Gracia & Weiss, 2019), while also facing disparities in the racial composition of students and the teaching force (Appendix E).

Student characteristics and academic performance. Compared to the state, Natchitoches

Parish serves a higher proportion of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (90% vs. 68% statewide) and a more racially and ethnically diverse student population (63% of students from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to 58% statewide; LDOE, 2023a). The district has been performing below the state in English Language Arts for the past two years (36% and 39% mastery and above in 2021 and 2022, respectively, versus 40% and 42% statewide; LDOE, 2023g). Almost half of the schools in the district received a rating of C or below in 2022 (LDOE, 2023f).

Equity of access to a high-quality and stable workforce. As shown in Figure 1, Natchitoches Parish has higher percentages of inexperienced teachers (20%), out-of-field teachers (40%), and teachers holding emergency or provisional credentials (9%) compared to the percentages statewide (LDOE, 2023d). Within the district, 100% of out-of-field or uncertified teachers and 96% of all novice teachers are distributed across the 11 high-need schools. Also, while Louisiana retains 86% of the teacher workforce (LDOE, 2023b), Natchitoches Parish has a lower retention rate of 77%. The average tenure for principals nationwide is four years (Levin et al., 2020), but in Natchitoches Parish, it is three years. Additionally, certain high-needs schools in the district have experienced up to three leadership changes within a five-year period.

Figure 1. Teacher Qualifications in Natchitoches Parish Compared to the State of Louisiana



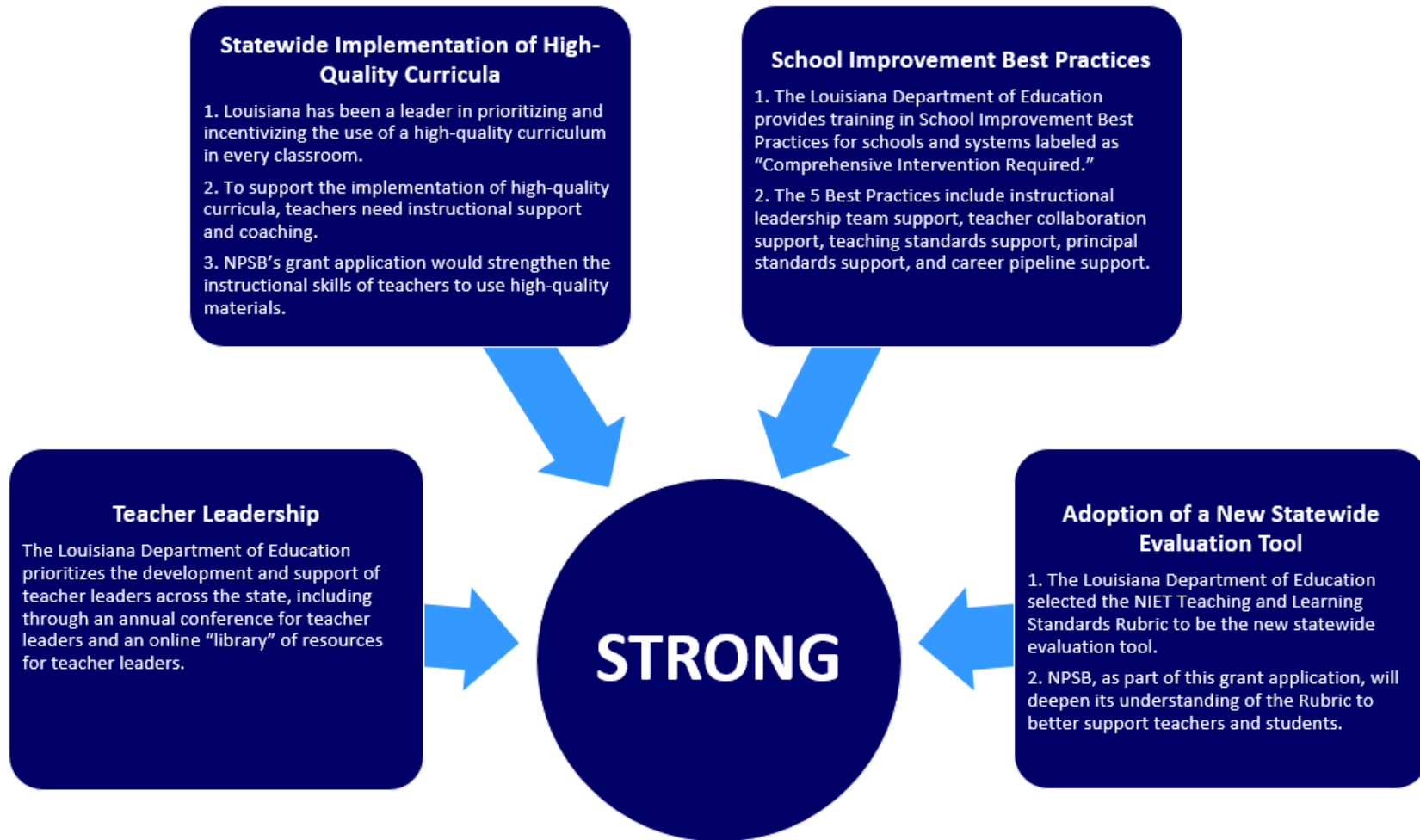
Lack a diverse teaching force. Research suggests that diversifying the teacher workforce can positively impact students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Student-teacher racial match has been shown to boost student academic performance (Grissom et al., 2017), lower the likelihood of chronic absenteeism and suspension (Holt & Gershenson, 2015), and increase college aspirations (Gershenson et al., 2017). Increasing teacher workforce diversity may also help reduce feelings of isolation and fatigue often experienced by teachers who are one of a few teachers of color in their schools (Griffin & Tackie, 2016), which in turn may improve teacher job satisfaction and retention (Carver-Thomas, 2018). In Natchitoches Parish, 63% of the students are people of color, but only 29% of the teachers are people of color. The disparities between the racial composition of teachers and the racial composition of their students in Natchitoches Parish are larger than those in the region and statewide (LDOE, 2023e).

(ii) Build on similar efforts to improve relevant outcomes using existing funding streams

State policy and priorities alignment. Louisiana has been a national leader in the adoption of high-quality curricula, and has backed up these requirements with statewide training and support for five best practices that help districts support the use of high-quality instructional materials. These state “best practices” align directly to the elements of this proposal and include support for: instructional leadership teams, teacher collaboration, teacher and principals standards and coaching, and career pipeline development. NIET is an approved provider of best practice training in Louisiana.

Teacher leaders are a foundation of the state’s successful approach, and the state provides annual training for teacher leaders, along with a library of resources for teacher leaders. NIET supports the state with high-impact training at the annual Teacher Leadership Summit. This proposal aligns to and builds on these state initiatives by supporting Natchitoches to put in place

Figure 2. STRONG Strategies Align to State Policy and Priorities



formal teacher leader roles and develop a district-wide human capital management system and performance-based compensation system. The district's work on developing a high-quality PBCS will provide a model for other districts who are looking for ways to fund teacher leadership positions and design those roles to impact student academic achievement.

In addition, NIET's Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric is approved for use statewide in the implementation of high-quality curricula. This summer, Louisiana is poised to adopt new statewide teacher and principal standards aligned to NIET's teacher and principal rubrics, and to the statewide best practices and teacher leadership initiatives described above. This creates strong alignment between this proposal and state policy and funding (see Appendix F1 for additional detail), thus building toward sustainability. NIET is also an approved statewide vendor of training for mentor teachers. Educator preparation programs at multiple universities across the state of Louisiana, including the largest provider of teacher training - Southeastern Louisiana University, are embedding NIET's teaching rubric into coursework and field experiences. This alignment of standards facilitates district-based induction training and support that is part of this grant application.

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

Project STRONG aims to establish coherence and shared goals within the HCMS by providing educators with the necessary structures, protocols, and tools to collaboratively enhance their instructional expertise. This will be achieved by supporting Natchitoches Parish School District in implementing an equitable, rigorous, valid, reliable, and objective process for evaluating educator effectiveness. The evaluation will be based on multiple performance measures, including student academic achievement, thereby ensuring a comprehensive assessment of

educators' capabilities. Natchitoches Parish School District currently uses NIET's Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric to support teacher growth. This rubric has four domains and 26 indicators describing teaching practice from unsatisfactory to exemplary. As teachers move toward exemplary, they move from teacher-directed to student-centered instruction in which students are invested in and take ownership of their own learning, in line with Louisiana's expectations for college and career standards. Furthermore, the district plans to adopt NIET's Principal Standards Rubric to support school leader improvement. This rubric defines excellence in school leadership represented in six domains: school mission, vision, and strategic goal setting; instructional leadership; capacity building; school environment/community and campus climate; ethics and integrity; and school operations/management. These domains and their research-based performance indicators serve as a tool for leadership, coaching, support, and evaluation. Use of both of NIET's rubrics in Natchitoches provides support to teachers and school leaders with similar processes and the same language.

NIET's Educator Effectiveness Preparation & Support System (EE PASS), which provides online access to professional development, training, evaluator certification, and data management through a single port of entry, further supports integration of the HCMS. Resources within EE PASS (Appendix F5) include filmed classroom lessons, coaching sessions, teacher professional development sessions, and instructional leadership meetings, as well as key TAP System implementation documents, such as the TAP Leadership Handbook and the TAP Evaluation and Compensation Guide. Natchitoches Parish School District educators will use this system to facilitate use of educator effectiveness data to make management decisions, such as recruitment, hiring, placement, professional development, advancement, compensation, retention, and dismissal.

(iv) Address the needs of the target population or other identified needs

The STRONG project will address the needs of Natchitoches Parish School District in multiple ways. The district believes that this comprehensive system supports implementation of sustainable strategies that will allow them to address the root causes underlying its challenges, weaknesses and gaps, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Gaps and Weaknesses Aligned to STRONG Strategies for Improvement

Gaps of Weaknesses/Root Causes	Strategies
Need to implement an evaluation system for school leaders that incorporates observations that are coupled with actionable feedback	Implement evaluation processes using valid and reliable rubrics for teachers and school leaders
Need to offer additional opportunities for career advancement to support the development of a plan to build a leadership pipeline	Create formal teacher leadership positions for teachers with strong instructional skills
Need for professional development that is job-embedded and directly ties to student and educator needs, specifically to support new teachers	Establish collaborative and relevant professional learning for teachers and school leaders
Need to offer more recruitment and reward incentives to compete with salaries of nearby larger districts	Implement a performance-based compensation system for teachers and school leaders
Need to more strongly connect evaluation to professional learning; need to provide additional professional learning opportunities to district leaders to support change management and sustainability	Develop a vision for enhancing the HCMS districtwide

B. Quality of the Project Design (25 points)

(i) Demonstrates a rationale

The rationale behind project STRONG is that increases in teacher and school leader effectiveness will result from both increases in the skills of current educators as well as improved recruitment and retention of effective, diverse educators due to the combination of increased support and opportunities for leadership roles and additional compensation (i.e., Berry et al., 2010; Center for American Progress, 2014; Hudgens et al., 2020; Hudson, 2010). Drawing on this rationale, Natchitoches will develop coherent HCMS structures through a clear vision for improvement and a plan for continuing to build alignment across elements of the HCMS. Additionally, Natchitoches will establish systems to support educators and their professional growth through four research-based strategies that form the foundation of the TAP System and our school-level STRONG strategies: 1) implementing evaluation processes using valid and reliable rubrics for teachers and school leaders, 2) creating formal teacher leadership positions for teachers with strong instructional skills, 3) establishing collaborative and relevant professional learning for teachers and school leaders, 4) implementing a PBCS for teachers and school leaders. These elements are further supported by a fifth strategy at the district level, dedicated to developing a distinct vision for enhancing the HCMS districtwide. Together, these strategies form a project design that is aimed at improving teacher and school leader effectiveness and, as a result, raising student achievement.

The TAP System theory of action has an extensive record of effectiveness in supporting high-need districts in multiple states to increase student achievement. Examinations of the impact of the TAP System across several locations by different researchers using varied methodological frameworks consistently show its positive impacts on student and school

outcomes (Barnett & Wills, 2016; Cohodes et al., 2023; Eren, 2019; Leutscher et al., in press; Mann et al., 2013; Schacter & Thum, 2005; Solmon et al., 2007). In Louisiana, an evaluation of the impact of the TAP System in high-need schools found a statistically significant and positive effect on math achievement during the second and third year of TAP System implementation (Eren, 2019). By the third year, the effect was reported to be “roughly equal to the observed effect from a one standard deviation increase in teacher quality” (p. 880). The author identified the TAP System as a cost-effective program and suggested future incentive programs include elements of the TAP System such as 1) multiple performance metrics (e.g., instructional practices and student performance), 2) both individual and group-based incentives, and 3) regular feedback to teachers about performance (Eren, 2019).

Another study conducted in South Carolina found that exposure to the TAP System in eighth grade had positive impacts on long-run educational attainment: 1) increased likelihood of twelfth grade enrollment and 2) increased likelihood of on-time high school graduation (Cohodes et al., 2023). TAP System exposure also had positive social benefits: 1) reduced arrest rates in adolescence and early adulthood and 2) less reliance on social welfare programs in adulthood. Additionally, the authors found that the benefits improved with more exposure to the TAP System: students exposed to the TAP System for four years had an improvement in twelfth grade enrollment rate more than three times that of students exposed for one year. Overall, the analyses of the impact of the TAP System showed that “it improved longer-term educational attainment and reduced criminal activity and dependence on government assistance for young people exposed to the program” (p. 26).

(ii) Relevant literature review, project implementation plan, and appropriate methods

The TAP System's theory of action is grounded in the literature (for a full list of the references, see Appendix F7). Studies conducted across multiple grade levels, multiple locations, and multiple years consistently demonstrate the positive impact of the TAP System on school leader (Hudgens & Barnett, 2017), teacher (Leutscher & Barnett, 2020; Logis et al., 2022), and student (Cohodes et al., 2023; Eren, 2019; Mann et al., 2013; Springer et al., 2014) outcomes. The positive impact of the TAP System can be attributed to its four elements – multiple career paths, ongoing applied professional growth, instructionally focused accountability, and performance-based compensation (PBC) – which both individually and as a whole have been shown to promote educational outcomes. A comprehensive approach to school reform that focuses on supportive structures for teachers has been shown to be highly effective for improving student achievement (Park et al., 2019).

Increasingly, schools are shifting away from traditional leadership structures toward an approach in which administrators work with teacher leaders to drive instructional improvements (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Teacher leadership roles, such as the mentor and master teacher roles in the TAP System's multiple career paths structure, allow effective teachers to utilize their expertise through modeling effective instruction and mentoring other teachers (Nguyen et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Moreover, studies show that teacher leadership is associated with positive school, teacher, and student outcomes, including school instructional improvement; teacher job satisfaction, self-esteem, effectiveness, and retention; as well as student achievement (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Schott et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2020; Snoek & Volman, 2014; Supovitz, 2018). These studies provide compelling evidence of teacher leadership's pivotal role in driving school improvement.

Effective teacher professional development is key for improving instructional practices and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2022). The ongoing applied professional growth element of the TAP System adheres to the features of professional development that research has found to be effective: models effective practice, incorporates active learning, promotes collaboration among teachers, can be sustained over time, and relates to teacher needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone et al., 2002). Indeed, research shows that teacher learning and student achievement increase when professional development is teacher-led, ongoing, collaborative, and relevant for teachers (Archibald et al., 2011; Bowgren & Sever, 2010; Doğan & Adams, 2018; Hill & Papay, 2022).

In order to improve classroom instruction, it is vital to conduct thorough assessments of teachers' practices and provide them with high-quality feedback. Studies show that teacher evaluation and support systems that include observation and follow-up feedback have positive effects on self-reflection and collaboration, instructional practices, and student performance (Kraft et al., 2020; Ritter & Barnett, 2016; Song et al., 2021; Therriault et al., 2020). Additionally, research shows that to be impactful, feedback needs to be specific, actionable, and objective (Frasier, 2022; Scheeler et al., 2004; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015; Taylor & Tyler, 2012; Thurlings et al., 2013; Tuma et al., 2018). The TAP System's instructionally focused accountability revolves around the implementation of evaluation systems that incorporate multiple observation and feedback cycles, with the aim of enhancing instructional quality and improving student performance.

PBC has been recognized as an effective strategy within HCMS, leading to improved outcomes for both teachers and students (Cohodes et al., 2023; Eren, 2019; Hanushek et al., 2023; Waynet et al., 2018). A study evaluating a Teacher Incentive Fund program found that

teachers in schools implementing PBC reported greater job satisfaction, had more improvement in observation scores, and had more improvement in student achievement compared to teachers in control schools (Chiang et al., 2017). Moreover, a meta-analysis showed that the positive effects of teacher merit pay on student achievement were equivalent to about four additional weeks of learning (Pham et al., 2020). PBC in the TAP System aligns with the best practices identified in the literature including employing multiple performance measures (both individual and group/school), providing comprehensive individual feedback alongside professional development opportunities, fostering strong leadership, conducting reliable analysis of student performance, and offering substantial award amounts (Boyd et al., 2005; Chingos & West, 2012; Eren, 2019; Ritter & Barnett, 2013).

To achieve improvement at the school level, districts must transition the role of the central office personnel from overseers to collaborators working alongside educators to implement district initiatives and goals (Bjork & Blasé, 2009) and build their capacity for improvement (Honig et al., 2010). A district-wide focus on instructional leadership has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of principals (Goldring et al., 2018). Notably, a recent report showed that the impact of having an effective principal on student achievement is comparable to that of having a similarly effective teacher (Grissom et al., 2021).

Character Education. Character education is a learning process through which students and adults in a school community understand, care about, and act on core values such as respect, justice, civic virtue, and responsibility for themselves and others (Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2005). The essential purpose of character education is to equip students with the intellectual skills to make wise decisions on their own (The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues, 2022). Character education helps students develop positive personal traits and

dispositions that are beneficial for lifelong success (Encalade & Staggs, 2021). Research evidence supports the importance of character education for developing student social and emotional skills (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Goldberg et al., 2019), regulating student behavior and discipline (e.g., Holtzapple et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2010;), enhancing school climate (e.g., Allensworth & Hart, 2018), and advancing student achievement (e.g., Jeynes, 2019; McCormick et al., 2021). As noted in the *Framework for Character Education in Schools* released by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2022), “In a broad sense, character education permeates all subjects, wider school activities, and a general school ethos. ... The sensible question to ask about a school’s character education strategy is not, therefore, whether such education does occur, but whether it is intentional, planned, organized, and reflective, or assumed, unconscious, reactive, and random.” Natchitoches Parish School District will use this grant opportunity to intentionally use the structures of the TAP System to support character education efforts.

Project implementation plan and appropriate methods. The partners in this grant have developed a high-quality plan for project implementation and successful achievement of objectives. Project strategies will be accomplished using key activities described in detail next (see Table 2 for an overview).

Table 2. Overview of STRONG Strategies and Activities

Strategy	Key Activities
School-level Strategies	
Implement evaluation processes using valid and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train teacher and principal evaluators on the evaluation process using the NIET rubrics.

reliable rubrics for teachers and school leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform multiple cycles of observation and feedback for school leaders and teachers. • Use evaluation data to inform human capital decisions.
Create formal teacher leadership positions for teachers with strong instructional skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish teacher leadership roles and responsibilities • Recruit and employ qualified individuals as teacher leaders. • Provide ongoing on-site support, coaching, and training specifically tailored to enhance the professional growth of teacher leaders in their job responsibilities.
Establish collaborative and relevant professional learning for teachers and school leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train school leadership teams to plan, deliver, monitor and improve job-embedded professional learning • Implement weekly collaborative learning opportunities for teachers through cluster meetings • Provide professional development for school leaders
Implement a performance-based compensation system for teachers and school leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a PBCS Committee • Create and implement a PBCS for teachers that is based on multiple performance metrics • Create and implement a PBCS for school leader that is based on multiple performance metrics
District-level Strategy	
Develop a vision for enhancing the HCMS districtwide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulate a plan for aligning the TAP System with the overarching goals of the district. • Develop a comprehensive plan to actively engage stakeholders

	<p>in the transformative process of the systems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide specialized coaching and guidance to district leaders to facilitate the successful implementation of a multi-year plan aimed at enhancing the HCMS.
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Implement evaluation processes using valid and reliable rubrics for teachers and school leaders. Natchitoches Parish School District is committed to fostering a shared understanding of effective classroom teaching that aligns with student learning growth and promotes consistency in observation scores across classrooms and schools. To achieve this, comprehensive training will be provided to district leaders, school leaders, and teacher leaders, equipping them with the necessary skills to accurately utilize the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric (Appendix F2) and the NIET Principal Standards Rubric (Appendix F3). Natchitoches Parish School District already uses NIET’s Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric, and will transition to using NIET’s Principal Standards Rubric to support alignment around process and language. Ensuring evaluators' expertise remains current, annual certification will be required for all evaluators.

The evaluator training also provides district and school leaders with a structured approach to delivering high-quality feedback that directly influences instructional practices and student achievement. Through this process, teachers will receive both an area of reinforcement, acknowledging an area of strength, and an area of refinement, identifying an area for growth. Specific follow-up, coaching, and support will be provided in the classroom to strengthen teaching and learning. Furthermore, data on areas of growth will be analyzed to inform the design of weekly job-embedded professional development sessions (called cluster meetings n

TAP schools) tailored to address these identified needs, providing teachers with ongoing learning opportunities.

Principal supervisors will engage in a comprehensive evaluation process to assess principal practice and support their professional growth. This process includes conducting beginning, middle, and end-of-year conferences with school leaders, as well as completing two cycles of evidence/artifact collections and observations.

For classroom teachers and teacher leaders, multiple cycles of formal observation will be conducted, providing clear evidence of their instructional practices and the corresponding student learning outcomes. Within two days of each observation, an in-person post-conference will be held, delivering actionable feedback aimed at continuous improvement. These evaluation procedures ensure that principal supervisors and evaluators provide high-quality feedback that supports the development of both school leaders and teachers. The goal is to foster a culture of ongoing improvement and enhance the overall quality of teaching and learning in the district.

Evaluation data from multiple measures of performance, including both teacher and student learning measures, will inform retention decisions and provide information to guide the equitable placement of effective and highly effective teachers. Natchitoches Parish School District will use NIET's Educator Effectiveness Preparation and Support System (EE PASS), a web-based portal, to support analysis and tracking of evaluation data and trends (Appendix F4). This data will also be used to identify and recruit candidates for teacher leadership roles. Data from principal evaluations will be used to inform retention and placement decisions for leaders, as well as inform high-quality coaching and professional learning opportunities that will be differentiated based on individual needs. Effective use of the evaluation systems, inclusive of

high-quality coaching and support encourages teachers and school leaders to stay in the role (Competitive Preference Priority 1).

Create formal teacher leadership positions for teachers with strong instructional skills

The district will create two school-based roles: master teachers and mentor teachers. Master teachers will support approximately 15-20 classroom teachers, lead professional learning, conduct classroom observations and provide feedback, and participate in the school leadership team. Mentor teachers, while remaining in the classroom, will be released for a designated amount of time each week to collaborate with the master teacher to support professional learning, observe classroom practice, provide intentional support for new teachers, and serve on the school leadership team. Mentor teachers will support approximately 8-10 classroom teachers. These teacher leaders will be interviewed, hired, and trained in the first year of the grant.

One key STRONG approach is to use teacher leader roles to attract and retain highly effective teachers and develop a leadership pipeline. The opportunity to receive high-quality support for improvement is a strong tool for recruiting effective teachers, as are leadership roles that enable teachers to remain connected to the classroom while playing a role in school leadership. Formal leadership roles enable teacher leaders to influence their colleagues to engage in instructional improvement (Supovitz, 2018). This creates a pipeline of leadership in schools, with effective classroom teachers moving into mentor or master roles as well as administrator positions. Strategic and intentional recruitment activities will be guided and supported by district and school leaders.

Establish collaborative and relevant professional learning for teachers and school leaders

The district will work with NIET to train school leaders to lead a high-functioning, school-wide Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), which is essential to the success of the TAP

System. The ILT, led by the principal and joined by teacher leaders, develops the school plan for improving student learning. NIET's training builds the capacity of ILTs to manage and implement research-driven practices, utilize high-impact levers for improving instruction, lead collaborative learning teams, conduct meaningful observations and ensure all teachers benefit from individual coaching. District leaders will participate in the training, since they play an important role in reviewing existing practices and expenditures to ensure that school-based, job embedded professional learning is the primary mechanism for teacher professional learning.

The Project Director, in collaboration with NIET, will provide intensive, practice-based training for teacher leaders to enable them to provide high-quality professional learning for classroom teachers (Competitive Preference Priority 1). Our training and support visits in year one will focus on learning recovery and acceleration, to address immediate classroom needs. In addition, teacher leaders will be trained to lead weekly collaborative professional learning teams, analyze teacher and student data, identify and field test student learning strategies, and develop coaching plans for classroom teachers. This intensive core training will occur during the first year of the grant.

Implement a performance-based compensation system for teachers and school leaders

The TAP System supports districts to use performance-based compensation for high-performing teacher leaders who lead professional learning for groups of teachers as well as provide coaching and support for individual classroom teachers in their schools. Master teachers and mentor teachers receive salary augmentations (██████████0, respectively) for taking on additional responsibilities. The use of teacher leaders allows the district to better provide all teachers with high-quality opportunities to improve their skills, which in turn, will be rewarded with performance-based compensation.

Additionally, starting in the first year of the grant, all educators will be able to earn performance-based compensation based on 1) observations ratings and 2) student growth. Teacher observation ratings are based on multiple observations using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric. A weighted average of observation ratings and responsibility indicators creates an overall, end-of-year Skills, Knowledge, and Responsibility (SKR) score for each teacher. The SKR scores range from a 1.0 (unsatisfactory performance) to 5.0 (exemplary performance) in half point increments. For school leaders, final ratings on the Principal Standards Rubric will be used. Scores also range from a 1.0 (unsatisfactory performance) to 5.0 (exemplary performance) in half point increments.

To determine the measure(s) for student growth, the district will form a Performance-based Compensation System Committee. This committee will be responsible for overseeing the alignment of PBCS measures with the district's mission, goals, and objectives. The committee will play a crucial role in communicating the functioning of the PBCS to key stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, and other relevant personnel. They will provide clarity on how PBC will be calculated and distributed, fostering transparency and understanding throughout the process. Another important task of the committee will be to monitor the timely calculation and distribution of performance awards. By ensuring accuracy and efficiency in this area, they will contribute to the overall success of the PBCS.

Finally, the committee will actively explore how the PBCS can complement other incentives within the larger Human Capital Management System (HCMS) strategy. This collaborative approach will maximize the effectiveness of the various components of the HCMS, leading to enhanced outcomes for educators and students alike.

Develop a vision for enhancing the HCMS districtwide

Natchitoches Parish School District will engage NIET to provide coaching and training for district leaders to plan for effective implementation in order to 1) assess district structures and create a plan for aligning elements of their HCMS to district goals; 2) strengthen evaluation processes to produce valid and reliable measures of teacher and principal performance; 3) identify key decision points where performance data will drive HCMS decisions including recruitment, hiring, placement, retention, career advancement, and dismissal; and 4) refine a strategic compensation plan that will advance a more effective staffing structure and more diverse faculty in schools.

The district sees a growing opportunity to strengthen the support provided to educators, so that they can help their students build a well-rounded skill set, including often less emphasized character traits such as autonomy, curiosity, judgment, reasoning, and resourcefulness. Natchitoches Parish School District and NIET will work collaboratively to support teachers effectively integrating and delivering character education within the classroom environment. Programmatic solutions have offered short-term triage as schools seek to recover learning loss and navigate virtual learning situations; however, educators are needing support that will build systems centered on research-based best practices and sound teaching to embed character and social-emotional learning support within their work without adding more to their plate. Natchitoches Parish School District solution to this is to integrate character education into HCMS improvements.

Supporting teacher educators requires a collaborative effort that begins at the district level. This is even more true for supporting new teachers who are making the transition from preparation to practice. Natchitoches Parish School District is committed to support induction efforts through this collaborative effort in an effort to establish structures and a network of

support that builds the confidence of new teachers as professional educators. NIET will support this work by ensuring the individuals supporting induction have knowledge of effective instructional practices, high-quality strategies to coach novice teachers, and create opportunities for collaborative learning through program design (i.e., cluster meetings). NIET will support Natchitoches Parish School District to identify current practices, areas of strength, and opportunities for improvement; establish a timeline for implementation and recommended training and consultation needs; and prioritize professional learning based on needs.

(iii) Methods of evaluation provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment

The evaluation of the STRONG project will be led by NIET's Research and Evaluation Department, which has extensive experience in overseeing large-scale evaluations of education programs (Appendix B). The evaluator will collaborate closely to lead a formative and summative evaluation with two purposes: 1) to provide grant partners with timely data to improve the project for the populations being served and 2) to assess the impacts of the program. The evaluation plan is in line with the project's logic model, which states that if programmatic structures, trainings, and support systems are implemented at the district and school level to strengthen and align the district's HCMS, there will be positive outcomes, including 1) improved teacher effectiveness, 2) enhanced school leader effectiveness, and 3) increased student achievement. The evaluation plan (Appendix F6) is organized around four research questions aligned with the nine Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 measures; it will serve as a working document to ensure the project is on track to meet objectives.

The project's logic model (Appendix A) will be used to communicate clearly the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes expected from the intervention. The evaluator will identify program implementation measures and data collection instruments that can be embedded into the

program delivery (such as systems for tracking training session attendance and engagement) as well as data reporting systems that can be used to drive continuous monitoring and improvement of program implementation. The evaluator will track program progress and analyze fidelity of implementation (Research Question [RQ] 1: How is the project being implemented and to what extent is implementation sustainable?). Qualitative data used to assess fidelity of implementation will include program artifacts, surveys, and interviews with partners. NIET's annual school review process, which consists of classroom, ILT, and PLC observations, will serve as one of these critical data sources for assessing fidelity of implementation and providing feedback to district and school leaders.

Each year, the evaluator will interview school and district personnel to assess perceived quality of the program and program impact. To ensure reliability and validity, interview responses will be used in combination with a review of documents and system reports. This data triangulation allows for a higher level of validity in the qualitative research process. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and coded by at least two researchers. This work, along with analyses of implementation fidelity measures, will help identify key variables that impact implementation.

Qualitative and quantitative data will also be used to address the remaining research questions about program impact (RQ2: What are the effects of participation in the project on teacher outcomes? RQ3: What are the effects of participation in the project on principal and other school leader outcomes? RQ4: What are the effects of participation in the project on student achievement?). In addition to interview and survey data, the evaluator will obtain longitudinal administrative data from the district and the state. These data will include administrative records (e.g., position vacancies, new hires, and teacher and school leader

demographics), retention rates and evaluation ratings for teachers and school leaders, and student outcomes (primarily student achievement).

The evaluator will maintain regular communication with key project personnel through quarterly update meetings to discuss plans, progress, and preliminary data. As outlined in the evaluation plan, the evaluator will provide timely summaries of findings based on analyses of program implementation and impact data. For example, program data and artifacts will be discussed during monthly meetings with the project director, and educator effectiveness and student achievement data will be analyzed and shared with key personnel on an annual basis. At the conclusion of the grant, the evaluator will assess the overall accomplishment of goals and conduct a comprehensive analysis of lessons learned.

Natchitoches and NIET will work together to disseminate findings at the local, state, and national levels through newsletters, research and policy reports, professional conferences, social media, and other public forums throughout the year. At the local level, Natchitoches will establish quarterly communications to monitor progress, ensure implementation is on track and address any challenges they may be facing, and to share the results of the project. Natchitoches schools will also continue to employ various communication outreach methods, such as quarterly state of the union addresses involving all faculty, triennial state of the union meetings involving principals and parents, and a weekly district newsletter to keep all stakeholders informed about ongoing events and initiatives.

At the state level, information about project implementation and findings will be shared with community stakeholders in Louisiana through presentations at regional meetings or conferences (e.g., Louisiana Education Research Association, Louisiana Teacher Leaders Summit). Finally, at the national level, the project results will be disseminated via public

repositories (e.g., the Public Domain Clearinghouse on Communities360, a portal for the U.S. Department of Education’s Effective Education Development grantee communities), presented at professional and research conferences (e.g., American Educational Research Association, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Teacher Leadership Conference), and shared at the meetings with policymakers and legislators. NIET has previously shared its most promising findings in Washington, D.C. during Congressional Hearings, meetings with policymakers and legislators, and other advocates for educator quality, and it will continue to do so to inform policy and impact educational reform. The evaluator will also incorporate findings into the annual performance reports to address progress toward key performance measures.

C. Quality of the Management Plan (25 points)

Natchitoches Parish School District will serve as the fiscal agent for the proposed TSL grant. Natchitoches Parish School District has served successfully as the fiscal agent for grants and will utilize these experiences and strategies to implement the proposed grant’s clearly defined responsibilities and milestones on time and within budget. Table 3 is organized around three key components: 1) the project milestones and tasks, 2) key personnel who will perform these tasks, and 3) timeline for completing them. The milestones described on Table 3 are aligned to the logic model (Appendix A) and project description within Section B, including each of the five project strategies represented as S1-S5. The responsible party column denotes who will lead each milestone or key task, and includes: District Administration (DA), Project Director (PDs), school leaders (SL), teacher leaders (TL), and NIET. Quarter 1 begins in October of each year. Milestones are in bold and the activities to meet those milestones are in plain text

Additionally, the submitted budget narrative provides the cost details. Natchitoches Parish School District’s leadership and budget teams are well experienced in managing and executing large-scale projects on time and within budget.

Table 3. Milestone and Key Tasks Summary

Milestones (bold)	Responsible Party	Quarter			
		1	2	3	4
Key Tasks to meet each milestone (connection to Strategy 1-5)					
Year 1 - Milestones and Key Tasks					
Complete Project Start-up					
Establish TSL Advisory Board (S5)	PD	✓			
Kickoff meeting with district leadership (S5)	PD, DA, NIET	✓			
Provide data-driven implementation workshops (S1-S4)	PD, DA, NIET	✓			
Establish PBCS Committee (S4, S5)	PD	✓			
Hire communications manager & develop communications plan (S5)	PD		✓		
Establish Project Advisory Committees and Schedules					
TSL Advisory Board meetings (quarterly) (S5)	PD, DA, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
PBCS Committee meetings (quarterly) (S4, S5)	PD, DA,		✓	✓	✓
Establish cluster schedule for 2023-24 (S3)	SL, PD, DA	✓			
Hire Master Teachers					
Establish committee for master teacher and mentor teacher selection (S1)	PD, NIET	✓			
Recruit, interview, hire master and mentor teachers (S1)	PD, SL, DA	✓			
Deliver Foundational Training					

CORE Training on elements of the HCMS (evaluation, professional learning, goal setting, instructional leadership, differentiated support for new and under certified teachers) (S1-S5)	NIET, DA, SL	✓	✓	✓	✓
NIET National Conference and Summer Institute (S1-S3)	PD, DA, SL, TL		✓	✓	
Deliver Annual Coaching and Support					
Provide on-site school support and coaching (monthly) (S1-4)	NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provide district support (bimonthly) (S4)	NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collaborative learning group for school leaders (quarterly) (S2)	PD, DA, NIET		✓	✓	✓
Collaborative learning group for teacher leaders (quarterly) (S2)	PD, SL, NIET		✓	✓	✓
Begin TAP Implementation for school year 2023-24					
Teacher observations, cluster meetings, ILT meetings (S1-3)	SL, TL	✓	✓	✓	✓
School leader and ILT observations, goal setting (S1-3)	SL, TL	✓	✓	✓	✓
School Reviews (S1-5)	NIET			✓	
Complete Project Monitoring and Evaluation Tasks					
Baseline data collection (observation, survey, interview, student growth) (S4, S5)	PD, Research	✓			
Implementation and quality assurance meetings (monthly) (S1-5)	PD, SS, LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Calculate and Award Performance-based Compensation					
PBCS Committee meetings (quarterly) (S4, S5)	PD, DA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Enter PBC data into data management system (S4)	PD, SL			✓	✓
Calculate PBC awards for teachers and school leaders (S4)	PD, DA			✓	✓

Award PBC for teachers and school leaders (S4)	DA				✓
Years 2 and 3 – Milestones and Tasks					
Conduct Project Advisory Committees (Hire as needed)					
TSL Advisory Board meetings (quarterly) (S1)	PD, DA, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recruit, interview, hire new teacher leaders (if necessary) (S3)	DA, SL			✓	✓
Continue Delivering Trainings					
Quarterly trainings with master teachers (S2 S3)	PD, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly trainings with school leaders (S1-3)	PD, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly training to provide differentiated support for new and under certified teachers	PD, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
NIET National Conference and Summer Institute (S1-3, S5)	PD, DA, SL, TL			✓	✓
Deliver Annual Coaching and Support					
Provide on-site school support and coaching (monthly) (S1-3, S5)	NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provide district support (bi-monthly) (S5)	NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Master teacher meeting (quarterly) (S2)	PD, NIET		✓	✓	✓
Continue TAP Implementation for school years 2024-25 and 2025-26					
Teacher observations, cluster meetings, ILT meetings (S1-3)	SL, TL	✓	✓	✓	✓
School leader and ILT observations, goal setting (S1-3)	SL, TL	✓	✓	✓	✓
School Reviews (S1-5)	PD, SS			✓	
Calculate and Award Performance-based Compensation					
PBCS Committee meetings (quarterly) (S4, S5)	PD	✓	✓	✓	✓

Enter PBC data into data management system (S1, S4)	PD, SL	✓	✓	✓	✓
Calculate PBC awards for teachers and school leaders (S4)	PD, DA			✓	✓
Award PBC for teachers and school leaders (S4, S5)	DA				✓
Complete Project Monitoring and Evaluation Tasks					
Implementation and quality assurance meetings (monthly) (S1-5)	PD, DA, NIET	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data collection (observation, survey, interview, growth) (S1-5)	PD, Research			✓	✓
Analyze data for human capital decisions (S1, S4, S5)	PD, DA, SL		✓	✓	

The proposed grant’s project team is extremely qualified with the necessary skills, abilities, and experience to carry out this work successfully from implementation to evaluation, reporting, and fiscal management. Key project personnel will be responsible for ensuring that project tasks are completed on time and all milestones are met. Specifically, Kathy Noel will serve as Project Director. With a 100% time and effort allocation, she will oversee daily management and coordination of this project and work most directly with the school partners to ensure the goals and objectives are achieved on time and within budget. The Project Director will communicate with key district points of contact and NIET personnel regularly to ensure effective and proactive management. With more than 30 years of experience in the field of education, and experience overseeing district-wide implementation of the TAP System in another Louisiana district, Kathy is well-positioned to serve in this role (Appendix B). Natchitoches Parish School District will also hire a bookkeeper who will support the processing of monthly grant financial statements, payroll systems, and reporting. The Project Director will meet with the bookkeeper on a regular basis to review budget projections and expenditures. Patti Cruz, NIET’s Executive Director of Services, will support the coordination of all NIET training and support, and oversee

the NIET Senior Specialist who will be responsible for providing on-site training and coaching. Patti brings more than a decade of experience working with TAP System schools to strengthen teaching and learning, and is a highly skilled trainer and coach. Dr. [REDACTED] is NIET's Vice President of Research and Evaluation. She has extensive experience conducting evaluations of dozens of federal grants, and will support grant evaluation, reporting, and dissemination efforts.

D. Adequacy of Resources (30 points)

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

Natchitoches Parish School District has a clear vision for the systems improvement we will achieve through the TSL grant. We have in place key elements for success including:

- Multiple district-level administrators within the district have experience successfully implementing the TAP System
- The School Board and community leaders are committed to this work, as noted in the included letters of support.
- The district has committed to funding certain components of this work, including the use of NIET's Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric. The district will adopt the NIET Principal Standards Rubric to support common processes and language across teachers and school leaders.

The STRONG project will build on this foundation to create a high-quality HCMS that supports improvement in student outcomes. This project will result in systems change at three levels.

First, the STRONG project will create *change in classroom practice* through: 1) multiple measures of teaching and learning to provide the data to set goals and monitor progress, 2) weekly collaborative learning teams led by trained teacher leaders that provide job-embedded

professional learning tied to specific classroom challenges, and 3) individual instructional coaching to provide teachers with hands-on guidance as they implement student learning strategies and improve their practice. School leadership teams build overall instructional leadership capacity to drive *school-level change*, including using data to set goals, designing professional learning, and ensuring that coaching and feedback are having an impact. District leadership teams create direct communication and collaboration among central office staff working to support *district-level change* and coordinate these changes in the schools they support. This coordination is enhanced as district leaders plan and deliver training for school leaders and use observation and feedback along with school visits to create a consistent and coherent message for principals about priorities and goals.

(ii) Build local capacity that address the needs of the target population

STRONG will prioritize building local capacity to provide, improve, and expand services that address responding districts' teacher, school leader, and student needs. Using the District Instructional Framework (Appendix F4), with its clearly defined indicators for instructional excellence, NIET will support district leaders in improving district practices and embedding those improvements in existing structures and systems to ensure sustainability. To strengthen district systems of instructional support for schools, NIET will collaborate with Natchitoches Parish School Board in identifying high-impact action steps to improve instruction and provide coaching for district leaders aligned to those action steps. In addition, NIET will support Natchitoches Parish School Board in establishing district-level structures for delivering professional learning and coaching for school and teacher leaders.

The district leadership team (DLT) provides a critical focal point for strategic support for schools – bringing together central office leaders with different portfolios or areas of focus to work collaboratively to create coherence in these initiatives at the school level.

Support for school leaders includes quarterly collaborative meetings initially led by NIET that will later be facilitated by a member of the DLT and focused on specific areas for improvement based on school visits and observations. This collaborative work helps to extend strong practices and develop a shared commitment to district goals while building leadership capacity. Through these meetings, principals will develop a more consistent approach to evaluating classroom practice, reinforcing expectations across buildings. Teacher leaders attend similar collaborative quarterly meetings led by NIET and a designated DLT leader. Quarterly master teacher meetings provide opportunities to address shared problems of practice based on teacher and student needs and develop strategies for supporting more effective professional learning teams at the school level. Master teachers will work together to calibrate their understanding of strong instruction, creating consistency across the district. This systematic approach of targeted support builds capacity at all levels, including acting as a strong influencing factor in teachers' decisions to apply to and remain in jobs in Natchitoches Parish School District.

(iii) Resources to operate the project beyond the length of the grant

This TSL project has broad support from stakeholders as evidenced by the letters of support submitted by teachers, school leaders, district leaders, the school board, and project partner NIET (Appendix C). As the Dean of the Gallaspy College of Education and Human Development at Northwestern State University of Louisiana, stated, “This TSL application is directly aligned with the instructional focus of the School of Education within the Gallaspy College of Education

and Human Development. Through this approach, we will increase the success of our graduates in closing achievement gaps and helping K-12 students meet academic goals. This grant would provide opportunities for Northwestern State and Natchitoches Parish Schools to deepen our current relationship, while furthering the instructional effectiveness of teachers and school leadership. Our aligned goal is to expand and sustain a cadre of highly effective educators.”

Natchitoches Parish School District’s Superintendent has experience in creating long-term funding for this work and has convened senior leaders in the district to create a multi-year financial sustainability and management plan. The district is currently using existing districts funds to support ongoing implementation of some of the project components, and will continue to use these funds moving forward. Funds that are currently being used, and will continue to be used, include local funding, state National School Acts funding (based on poverty), and Title II(A) funding. In addition, the district will aggressively pursue other streams of funding that support all efforts to improve educator effectiveness.

The long-term sustainability and success plan for this project includes building collective buy-in, creating capacity through training and support, increasing educator skills and driving student growth, and establishing financial sustainability. The project is exceeding the 50% match requirement through in-kind time and effort of the districts’ career teachers and school leaders. Additionally, NIET is providing in-kind support each year of the grant. The transition of the structure of the school day to support cluster meeting schedules, personnel time and effort, and implementation of the HCMS make up the in-kind contribution, thereby demonstrating district commitment to implementing the system in the long-run. In addition, Natchitoches Parish Schools will continue to review other expenditures to determine if funds can be shifted as the improvements supported by the project show impact.