

Arizona Prioritizing Recruitment/Retention and Induction to Maximize Equity

(AZ PRIME)

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Introduction

Arizona’s teacher shortage continues to be a growing concern. Survey data from the Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association (ASPA, 2023) reported 11,439 teaching vacancies for the 2022–2023 school year. As of January 2023, 69% of these vacancies either remained unfilled or had been filled by individuals who did not meet the state’s standard teacher certification requirements. This teacher shortage disproportionately affects schools with a high concentration of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with over 90% of all emergency certified teachers in Arizona serving in Title-I schools (Bennett et al., 2021). Arizona also experienced over seven months of learning loss in math between 2019 and 2022, highlighting the urgency to address the teacher shortage (Education Recovery Scorecard, 2022). To help attract and retain effective teachers in schools that need them the most, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) is partnering with four Arizona districts – Avondale Elementary School District #44, Gadsden Elementary School District #32, Osborn School District #8, and a fourth district to be selected to join in the second year of the grant – in applying for a Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Program grant. In total, the three districts starting in the grant’s first year have 23 schools and serve a total of 13,364 students, 735 teachers, and 34 school leaders. Twenty-two of the 23 schools meet the high-need criteria (Appendix E).

This TSL grant, Arizona Prioritizing Recruitment/Retention and Induction to Maximize Equity, hereafter referred to as AZ PRIME, will focus on aligning, expanding, and improving the districts’ human capital management systems (HCMS), which include a performance-based compensation system and career advancement opportunities (Absolute Priority 1) in their high-need schools (Absolute Priority 2). Additionally, AZ PRIME will increase the effectiveness of educators, thereby reducing the variation in effectiveness across and within schools, and also

better enable the district to recruit and retain experienced, certified, effective, and diverse educators in an effort to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students (Competitive Preference Priority 1; Competitive Preference Priority 2). The sustainable HCMS supported through this grant opportunity will enhance district efforts to recruit and retain effective teachers, boosting the academic achievement of all students.

In early 2023, Secretary Cardona issued a national call to "raise the bar" and make bold improvements in teaching and learning. AZ PRIME directly answers this call by aiming to enhance the systems that support the most important work of schools: great classroom teaching and learning. Rather than relying on add-on programs or one-time interventions, AZ PRIME focuses on improving teaching and learning conditions, improving educator retention, and eliminating the teacher shortage through providing additional compensation based on performance, fulfilling teacher leadership roles, and equipping teachers with the necessary support to meet student needs, such as school-based professional collaborative learning, individual coaching, and induction support for new teachers. Furthermore, AZ PRIME supports school and district leaders in building their instructional leadership capacity, along with their teams, to effectively provide guidance and support. Secretary Cardona's vision of delivering comprehensive, rigorous education to every student, improving learning conditions, and ensuring pathways aligns closely with this proposal, which seeks to strengthen and align existing systems and structures in schools and districts. This approach empowers teacher leaders to collaborate closely with school leaders, bringing their expertise and capacity to improve instruction at scale and better serve the individual needs of each student.

AZ PRIME districts will use NIET's evidence-based TAP System as the base to align five HCMS strategies: 1) implement valid and reliable evaluation processes for teachers and

school leaders; 2) expand formal, instructionally focused roles for teacher leaders; 3) implement job-embedded, collaborative professional learning for teachers and school leaders; 4) create and implement a system of performance-based compensation (PBC) for teachers and school leaders; and 5) create a clear vision for HCMS improvement and alignment for district leaders.

In addition to supporting instructional leadership and instructional best practices, NIET's professional learning for educators will include support around building an inclusive and positive school culture through the integration of character education. Character formation is increasingly seen as crucial in student success. Grit, responsibility, self-direction, goal setting, and perseverance foster a growth mindset, supporting students' intellectual success and lifelong accomplishments. Teachers and school leaders play a role in teaching character education, and intentional character development can enhance school environments and classroom instruction.

Through AZ PRIME, the districts will also strengthen their capacity to provide a cohesive induction system to support new teachers to integrate into the school community and build effective instructional practices. The implementation of the above strategies will help enhance districts' relationship with university partners by building systems of support for all educators. It will also offer new educators a strong foundation of support by increasing efforts to recruit and develop experienced, fully certified, in-field, effective, and diverse educators. These structures will enable AZ PRIME to attain project objectives to 1) improve teacher effectiveness, 2) improve school leader effectiveness, and 3) improve student academic performance.

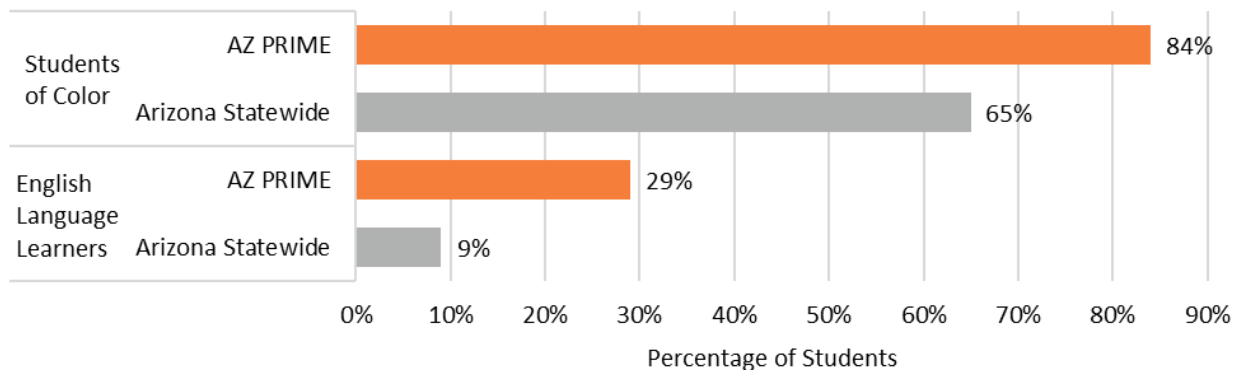
A. Need for Project

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

The AZ PRIME districts are spread across diverse locations in Arizona. Avondale Elementary School District #44, located in the suburbs of Phoenix, includes nine schools that

serve 5,889 students from preschool to eighth grade. Osborn School District #8, situated in the heart of Phoenix, encompasses six schools that serve a racially and ethnically diverse student body, including 14% Black, 62% Hispanic, 5% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 4% multiple races. Gadsden Elementary School District #32, positioned in a town along Arizona's southwest corner near the international border, consists of eight schools that serve 4,955 students, with 99% of them identifying as Hispanic, and approximately 94% qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunch. Overall, the AZ PRIME districts have a higher percentage of students of color (84%) and English language learners (29%), compared to the statewide figures (65% and 9%, respectively; Arizona Department of Education [ADE], 2023b). Additionally, more than three-fourths of the students in the AZ PRIME districts qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (Arizona Department of Education Health and Nutrition Services, 2023).

Figure 1. Student Demographics in AZ PRIME Districts versus Statewide



Similar to other districts that serve students from historically marginalized backgrounds (Gracia & Weiss, 2019), AZ PRIME districts face challenges in recruiting and retaining effective teachers and school leaders. High levels of educator turnover in AZ PRIME districts drain valuable resources and make building a high-performing, stable teaching faculty difficult. School leaders also have limited years of experience and face the challenge of creating meaningful, job-embedded professional learning and instructional support for teachers to make significant and

sustained gains with students. Further, in two AZ PRIME districts, disparities exist between the racial composition of the students and the teaching force.

Recruiting and retaining effective teachers. Attracting talent has become increasingly challenging for AZ PRIME districts, as local districts raise salaries and offer sign-on bonuses. These districts also experience teacher shortages resulting from a decline in new teacher pipelines and increased teacher turnover. The average teacher turnover rate is 21% in AZ PRIME districts, which is higher than the recently reported nationwide figure of 10% (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023). Consistent with previous reports (Carver-Thomas, 2022; Sutchter et al., 2016), the districts attribute this turnover to challenging working conditions caused by COVID-19, increased need for student support, and compensation issues such as rising cost of living and higher salaries in other industries. To address teacher shortage, Osborn School District #8 partners with Teach for America, placing cohorts of 2-8 teachers annually, employs certified teachers from other countries through the International Teach Alliance, and is exploring an additional international exchange partnership with the Spirit Cultural Exchange. As more educators enter the profession through various non-traditional pathways, there is a need to establish and support a rigorous induction program that goes beyond an extra week of training before their first year of teaching.

Building the capacity of the current educator workforce. In addition to the challenges of recruiting and retaining effective educators, AZ PRIME districts are confronted with the task of building the capacity of their current educators, who often lack experience and full certification (ADE, n.d.-a; n.d.-b; n.d.-c; n.d.-d). On average, 29% of AZ PRIME district teachers, principals, and other school leaders have less than three years of experience, compared to 20% statewide. Additionally, about 5% of the districts' teachers hold emergency or

provisional credentials, which is four percentage points higher than the statewide figure. AZ PRIME districts also employ a higher percentage of out-of-field teachers, ranging from 19% to 39%, compared to the statewide rate of 9%. Recognizing the importance of a high-quality educator workforce, AZ PRIME districts have expressed the need for ongoing professional learning opportunities, mentoring, and support for both teachers and school leaders. For example, AZ PRIME districts recognize the need to support site-level leaders in overcoming barriers to ensure excellent educators in every classroom. This support would include coaching current school leaders while also establishing a mentorship pipeline for career advancement and cultivating a pool of talented individuals who are prepared for future leadership roles.

Increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce. Currently, about half of the AZ PRIME districts' teachers are white, despite serving predominantly students of color (84%). Teacher diversity has been linked to positive student academic, social, and emotional outcomes (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Research shows that matching students with teachers of the same race improves academic performance, reduces absenteeism and suspension rates, and increases aspirations for higher education (Gershenson et al., 2017; Grissom et al., 2017; Holt & Gershenson, 2015). A more diverse teacher workforce can also address the isolation and fatigue experienced by teachers of color in predominantly white schools (Griffin & Tackie, 2016), ultimately improving job satisfaction and retention (Carver-Thomas, 2018). The existing racial disparity within the AZ PRIME districts underscores the pressing need to actively promote and increase teacher diversity, creating a teaching force that better reflects and meets the needs of the student body.

Improving student academic performance. Educator shortage has a detrimental impact on student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). In 2022, the average

passing rate for the English Language Arts (ELA) state assessment was 30% in AZ PRIME districts, 10 percentage points below the state's performance. For the math state assessment, AZ PRIME districts achieved an average passing rate of 26% compared to the statewide rate of 33% (ADE, 2023a).

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

AZ PRIME will leverage existing funding streams from various community, state and federal resources to enhance relevant outcomes. AZ PRIME districts use existing funding sources to employ teacher leaders and provide professional learning for school leaders and teachers. However, with 29% of current district, school and other school leaders having less than three years of experience and an average turnover rate of 21%, the available funds are not sufficient to provide the necessary systematic support to rebuild the leadership career pipeline and address the challenges posed by the high teacher turnover.

Integrating with and building on existing community and federal investments. As described by Superintendent Betsy Hargrove of Avondale Elementary School District, “the work proposed in this application will expand upon what we have accomplished over the last few years to improve the skills of our school leaders and our classroom teachers and has the potential to make a meaningful difference in the success of all educators we support.” All AZ PRIME districts have made strides toward improving educator effectiveness. They have created career advancement opportunities for teachers, provided teachers with coaching and feedback, and implemented strategies identified as best practices. Where the districts are seeking additional support and are optimistic about this grant opportunity, as reflected in the 39 letters of support (Appendix C), is to unify and integrate systematic, effective practices of aligned support. These practices include identifying and developing teacher leaders, providing structures and support for

school and district leaders to lead continuous improvement efforts, coaching teachers to improve practice based on a common language of instructional effectiveness, integration of character education to build a positive school culture, and implementing a local, new teacher induction model. AZ PRIME districts are eager to expand these practices for improvement in their human capital decision-making processes.

As described within the logic model and theory of action (Appendix A), the current grant expands on the work of the existing efforts and funding streams. Using local resources, Avondale Elementary School District #44, Gadsden Elementary School District #32, and Osborn School District #8 have taken initial steps to establish components of the HCMS proposed in this project, such as:

- Adopted and implemented the state-approved, evidenced-based NIET educator evaluation systems: the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and the NIET Principal Standards Rubric. Both evaluation tools establish a common language for assessing educator effectiveness and serve as a tool for evaluation and a professional growth blueprint for teachers and school leaders.
- Established teacher leadership roles where teachers serve as instructional leaders to support their peers and to create a local pipeline for educational leaders.
- Engaged with local universities to provide under-certified teachers with opportunities to complete a program for certification.

State policy and priorities alignment (Appendix F1). As described above, AZ PRIME districts rely on emergency and under-certified teachers to fill vacancies. In 2022, the state passed legislation to allow individuals without a bachelor's degree to teach while completing their degree and training. As a result, new teachers enter districts with various experiences and

needs. Districts must create layered support systems to ensure new teachers are supported to implement effective instructional practices through weekly professional learning and individual instructional coaching.

Another area of strong alignment with Arizona policies is in teacher compensation reform. Arizona created a performance pay fund in 2000, yet few districts use it for PBC tied to student academic growth. In addition, the Governor has called for increasing teacher compensation as a key lever in addressing what she describes as a teacher retention crisis. This proposal would create powerful proof points on how to use compensation to increase teacher effectiveness and student academic achievement. AZ PRIME districts have established key elements of this reform, and this proposal would create model district plans to be shared statewide.

Further, this proposal aligns with state priorities related to the recruitment, training and retention of educators to Arizona schools. Two Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in the state, Arizona State University (ASU) and Northern Arizona University (NAU), partner with NIET and AZ PRIME districts (Competitive Preference Priority 2). Both HSIs use NIET's Aspiring Teacher Rubric - a rubric based on and aligned to the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric - throughout the respective educator preparation programs' course of study. As described above, AZ PRIME districts utilize the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric as a professional growth and evaluation tool for teachers. The use of these tightly aligned rubrics supports a coherent and shared understanding of high-quality practice that is developed starting in preparation during coursework and clinical experiences and continued through professional experiences of aspiring teachers and novice teachers in schools.

The TSL grant offers AZ PRIME districts the opportunity to develop and expand existing structures through the implementation of a comprehensive HCMS, building on initial efforts each district has taken to establish teacher leader positions to support teachers and, in turn, students. AZ PRIME will enhance partner districts' structures through comprehensive and intentional training and support for school and teacher leaders. Aligned with the core strategies outlined in this proposal, the provided training and support will equip AZ PRIME school and teacher leaders with skills, knowledge and disposition to implement and sustain systems of continuous improvement.

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

This proposal combines the benefits of using an evidenced-based model with demonstrated results in high-need districts across the nation and the resources of a national nonprofit partner, with the flexibility to use this model to address the local and individual needs of educators and students in AZ PRIME districts. The TAP System establishes a comprehensive framework to guide efforts to improve teaching and learning. The districts' visions for instructional improvement will be advanced by aligning instructional improvement goals with its HCMS functions for evaluation, professional development, compensation, retention, recruitment, placement and hiring. Further, these HCMS functions will utilize a common set of educator competencies for teachers and school leaders that include maximizing efforts to improve teaching and learning. The NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric defines competencies for teachers and the NIET Principal Standards Rubric defines school leader competencies. Both educator evaluation tools establish clear and consistent expectations for effective practices, create a common understanding for teacher and school leader moves that lead to outcomes for students and serve as a scaffold for professional growth. Effective implementation of both tools

for evaluation and professional growth will allow AZ PRIME districts to use reliable performance information from the evaluation support system to inform key human capital decisions.

PBC will reinforce these clearly defined competencies through the implementation of a comprehensive performance award system that combines educator evaluation ratings with student growth measures to establish competitive awards for all AZ PRIME educators. Further, additional compensation for teacher leaders who provide instructional support for teachers will build AZ PRIME districts' HCMS capacity to recruit and retain teacher leaders who have demonstrated effectiveness. Through these enhancements, the HCMS will increase the districts' ability to attract, retain, develop and motivate a highly diverse and effective staff (Competitive Preference Priority 2). The work proposed in this TSL grant proposal aligns the districts' organization visions, improvement efforts, strategic plans as well as to multiple state policy goals, including equitable access to effective educators (Competitive Preference Priority 1).

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

AZ PRIME will enable districts to use strategic staffing, compensation, and other HCMS strategies to attract, develop, and retain a diverse and highly effective educator workforce in the Arizona education marketplace. The project strategies serve students by improving their access to quality instruction through intensive on-site support for district leaders, school leaders, and teacher leaders:

- District leader coaching will occur monthly using NIET's District Instructional Framework (Appendix F4) to align and strengthen HCMS elements, establish a District Leadership Team (DLT) to monitor and support high-quality TAP System implementation in schools, and build stakeholder support for systems change.

- School leader coaching will occur monthly with comprehensive training and support on leadership practices for teacher evaluation and professional growth. The training and support will ensure a valid and reliable evaluation process, including regular checks for inter-rater reliability and score inflation, and the establishment of congruence between student and teacher performance. NIET will also provide ongoing support to school leaders, including leadership team training, implementation of cluster meetings (ongoing job-embedded professional learning for teachers), and coaching support for teacher leaders. This support will equip school leaders to plan and facilitate strong leadership team meetings to meet school goals and increase the instructional capacity of teacher leaders and teachers in their buildings.
- Teacher leader training and coaching will occur on a monthly basis. NIET will provide customized monthly support for teacher leaders to deepen their understanding of strong instructional practices, lead professional development for teachers, and support teachers in the classroom by providing instructional coaching aligned with the needs of students. In addition to the monthly support, quarterly on-site training will be provided to teacher leaders focusing on data analysis and student performance tracking, instructional coaching techniques, strategies for building student ownership through the integration of character education, and implementation of strong cluster meetings for teachers that transfer to effective instructional practices.
- To bolster recruitment of diverse educators, AZ PRIME will strengthen districts' collaboration with ASU and NAU, while providing district-based induction training and support for new teachers. This comprehensive approach will ensure that new teachers in

AZ PRIME districts acclimate to the district and school culture, as well as meet the expectations for instructional effectiveness.

These activities collectively enhance district efforts for the recruitment, preparation, support, development, and retention of diverse educators. They contribute to fostering an inclusive, equitable and supportive workplace and school climate for educators, consistent with Competitive Preference Priority 1 and Competitive Preference Priority 2.

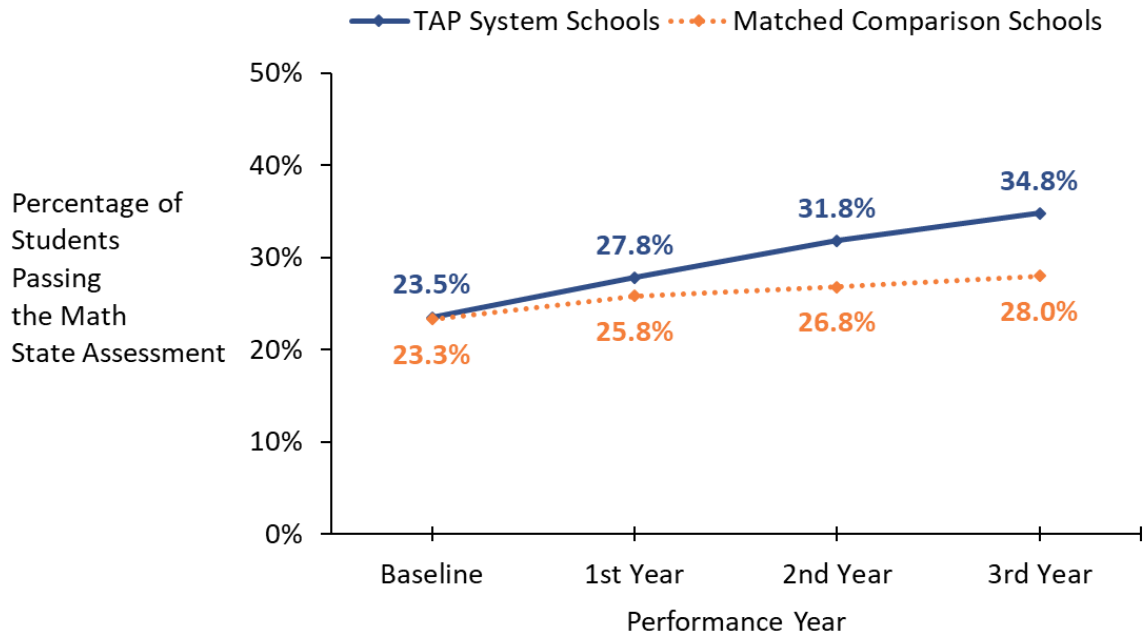
B. Quality of the Project Design

(i) Demonstrates a rationale

The rationale behind AZ PRIME 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, AZ PRIME districts 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 AZ PRIME strategies: 1) implement valid and reliable evaluation processes for teachers and school leaders; 2) establish and expand formal, instructionally focused roles for teacher leaders; 3) implement job-embedded, collaborative professional learning for teachers and school leaders; and 4) create and implement a system of performance-based compensation for teachers and school leaders. These elements are further supported by a fifth strategy at the district level, dedicated to creating a clear vision for HCMS improvement and alignment for district leaders. Together, these strategies form a project design aimed at improving teacher and school leader effectiveness and, as a result, raising student achievement.

The TAP System has an extensive record of effectiveness in supporting high-need districts in multiple states, consistently showing 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 Arizona, TAP System schools have experienced success in raising student achievement in high-need schools. Specifically, Leutscher and Barnett (2020) employed a quasi-experimental design to examine the impact of the TAP System implementation on student achievement after at least three years of TAP System implementation. Figure 2 presents the average percentage of students passing Arizona’s math achievement test for the TAP System schools and the matched comparison schools. The results showed that the TAP System schools improved performance at a higher rate than the matched comparison schools, demonstrating that the TAP System does sustain effectiveness.

Figure 2. Arizona TAP System Schools Outperform Matched Comparison Schools



An evaluation in Louisiana also found a significant positive effect on math achievement during the second and third year of TAP System implementation in high-need schools (Eren,

2019). By the third year, the effect was comparable to that of a one standard deviation increase in teacher quality. The TAP System was identified as a cost-effective program, and the author recommended incorporating its elements, such as multiple performance metrics, individual and group-based incentives, and regular feedback to teachers about performance, into future incentive programs (Eren, 2019). In South Carolina, exposure to the TAP System in eighth grade resulted in increased twelfth-grade enrollment, higher likelihood of on-time high school graduation, reduced arrest rates in adolescence and early adulthood, and decreased reliance on social welfare programs in adulthood (Cohodes et al., 2023). The study also found that the benefits increased with longer exposure to the TAP System. Overall, these findings validate the sustained effectiveness and long-term benefits of the TAP System.

(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 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 in improving student achievement (Park et al., 2019).

Schools are increasingly adopting collaborative leadership structures in which school leaders 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). Research indicates 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 to improve 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 addresses teacher needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone et al., 2002). Indeed, research shows that teacher-led, ongoing, collaborative, and relevant professional development enhances teacher learning and student achievement (Archibald et al., 2011; Bowgren & Sever, 2010; Doğan & Adams, 2018; Hill & Papay, 2022).

Thorough assessment of teachers' practices coupled with high-quality feedback is essential for improving classroom instruction. 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). 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 centers around implementing evaluation systems that include multiple observation and feedback cycles to improve instructional quality and student performance for all teachers.

PBC is associated with improved teacher and student outcomes (Cohodes et al., 2023; Eren, 2019; Hanushek et al., 2023; Waynet et al., 2018). A Teacher Incentive Fund program report 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). Additionally, 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). The TAP System's PBC aligns with the best practices identified in the literature, including employing multiple performance measures, 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).

Improvement at the school level requires districts to shift the role of the central office personnel from overseers to that of collaborators with educators to enact district initiatives and goals (Bjork & Blasé, 2009) and build their capacity for improvement (Honig et al., 2010). A district-level focus on instructional leadership has the potential to increase the effectiveness of principals (Goldring et al., 2018). A recent report equates the impact of an effective principal on student achievement with that of an equally effective teacher (Grissom et al., 2021). Informed by

the literature and prior evidence of TAP, the five project strategies will be accomplished using the following actions at the district, school leader, and teacher levels.

1. Implement valid and reliable evaluation processes for teachers and school leaders.

In year 1, NIET will train and (annually) certify observers to conduct evaluations using the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric and Principal Standards Rubric. The goal of this activity is to build a common understanding of strong classroom teaching that aligns with student learning growth and creates consistency in observation scores across classrooms and schools. This process helps avoid rater drift and supports inter-rater reliability efforts. A three-day evaluator training will allow district, school, and teacher leaders to effectively utilize the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric (Appendix F2) and establish inter-rater reliability in assessing classroom practice. This training equips district and school leaders to deliver high-quality feedback and instructional coaching that positively influence instructional practices and student achievement. Every classroom teacher will receive multiple cycles of formal evaluation. Within two days of each classroom observation, teachers will receive actionable feedback on one area of strength and one area of growth during a post-conference session, along with targeted support to strengthen teaching and learning. Trends in areas of growth inform the content of weekly cluster meetings, where teacher and school leaders share instructional strategies that have been field-tested in their own school and shown to be effective. This continuous evaluation process and professional development builds teacher capacity, both individually and collectively.

School leader evaluation will be based on the NIET Principal Standards Rubric, which describes effective leadership across multiple domains and indicators of leadership practice (Appendix F3). The rubric will promote collaboration around a common language and vision that correlates with student achievement. School leader evaluators will allocate time to conduct

multiple site-based observations to strengthen their ability to accurately evaluate school leader practice and provide high-quality feedback. School leaders and their evaluators will receive training and job-embedded coaching to provide a mutual understanding of strong leadership practices and a process for feedback and support. Teacher and school leader evaluators must pass a certification exam before conducting evaluations. The rigorous certification process includes identifying appropriate evidence and artifacts, scoring accurately using the evidence and artifacts and planning a post-conference coaching session. Annual recertification is required to ensure consistent, valid, and reliable scores, as normed against national raters.

AZ PRIME districts will use evaluation data, which will be based on multiple performance measures, to inform decisions regarding recruitment, hiring, placement, retention, dismissal, professional development, tenure, and promotion to ensure equitable placement of effective teachers and school leaders. AZ PRIME schools will have access to NIET's EE PASS web-based portal for reporting tools to analyze and track evaluation data and trends (Appendix F5). These data will help identify district needs, particularly for teacher leadership roles, and will serve as a powerful strategy for recruiting high-quality teachers. Districts will use data from school leader evaluations to inform retention and placement decisions for leaders. Data and feedback from the evaluation process will also drive differentiated coaching and professional learning opportunities for individual teachers. For school leaders, the standards for effective leaders that drive the evaluation process provide clear descriptions of leadership practices, providing a roadmap for improvement. The high levels of support and coaching provided for teachers and school leaders create a strong recruitment tool.

2. Establish and expand formal, instructionally focused roles for teacher leaders.

NIET will work with AZ PRIME districts to establish and expand teacher leadership roles and responsibilities that are defined to provide tiered support for teachers. By establishing and expanding formal, instructionally focused teacher leadership roles, districts will increase the instructional expertise at each school to ensure that all teachers, veteran and new, are provided intentional personalized support. The two school-based teacher leader roles are master teachers and mentor teachers. Master teachers will support approximately 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. Each school will have two to three master teachers, depending on school size, and a minimum of three mentor teachers.

AZ PRIME leverages teacher leader roles to attract and retain highly effective teachers and develop a leadership pipeline. The opportunity to receive high-quality training and support for continuous improvement is a strong tool for recruiting effective teachers, as are teacher leadership roles that enable teachers to remain connected to the classroom as they serve on a school instructional leadership team. Formal leadership roles enable teacher leaders to influence their colleagues to engage in instructional improvement (Supovitz, 2018), creating a leadership pipeline in schools where effective classroom teachers advance to mentor, master, or school leader positions. The NIET project director will guide and support the strategic and intentional recruitment activities.

NIET will support teacher leaders through on-site, job-embedded coaching and training. Teacher leaders will receive robust training in conducting classroom observation and feedback, planning and delivering cluster meetings, implementing instructional coaching cycles, and providing differentiated support for new and veteran teachers. In the first year, all school leadership team members will participate in foundational training, followed by a minimum of six visits each year from NIET specialists. Throughout the grant period, NIET will provide six days of on-site support for teacher leaders in each district every month. On-site support visits will coincide with teacher leaders' bi- collaborative learning meetings. Additionally, teacher leaders from AZ PRIME districts will have annual opportunities to attend NIET's national conference and summer institute for further training and collaboration with teacher leaders nationwide.

3. Implement job-embedded, collaborative professional learning for teachers and school leaders.

To promote equity in student access to educational resources and opportunities (Competitive Preference Priority 1), NIET will train school leadership teams to plan and deliver job-embedded, collaborative professional learning. School leaders will receive training to lead a high-functioning, site-based instructional leadership team (ILT), which plays a crucial role in the success of the TAP System. The ILT, led by the principal and composed of other school leaders and teacher leaders, develops an annual school plan for improving student learning and elevating the school's core instructional improvement strategies. Teacher leaders bring expertise and knowledge to the leadership team, given their role in leading cluster meetings, observing lessons and providing feedback, and coaching individual classroom teachers. School leaders'

effectiveness in leading the ILT will be measured using the ILT observation rubric as a part of their evaluation process.

Each partner school will implement weekly cluster meetings for teachers. Cluster meetings are teacher leader-led, job-embedded professional learning meetings that support groups of teachers within a grade level or content area. In the TAP System, professional learning is teacher-led, ongoing, and collaborative, and aligned to teacher and student needs. NIET will provide intensive training for teacher leaders to provide ongoing professional learning for classroom teachers. This training will equip teacher leaders to lead weekly collaborative cluster groups, analyze teacher and student data, identify and field test student learning strategies, and develop instructional coaching plans for classroom teachers. School leaders will also attend initial and ongoing training alongside teacher leaders, which strengthens the overall effectiveness of the ILT. NIET's training builds ILT's capacity to implement and monitor research-driven practices - including sustainable character education strategies that improve school culture and environments -, utilize levers for instructional improvement, lead collaborative cluster teams, conduct meaningful observations, strengthen instruction through individual coaching. District leaders will also receive training to ensure sustainable implementation of the intervention strategies and continuous school improvement.

NIET will provide robust professional development for school leaders, focusing on three areas to grow their capacity to serve all students: 1) creating and communicating an equitable school culture, 2) building shared instructional leadership, and 3) sustaining reflective practice through continuous improvement. School leaders will learn how to integrate character education that strengthens instruction and the environment. NIET will also involve district leaders, including school leader supervisors, to strengthen their coaching skills through an intensive

three-day training in year 1. In addition to individual coaching, observation, and feedback, districts will establish bi- school leader collaborative learning groups to collectively refine their skills. NIET's initial and ongoing training for school leaders and their supervisors will foster a shared and sustained vision of effective leadership, connecting school leader supervisors to each campus improvement effort through visits and coaching. This training will be reinforced through participation in NIET's national conference and summer institute, which are annual convening where school leaders have the opportunity to connect with peers nationwide engaged in similar improvement efforts.

4. Create and implement a system of performance-based compensation for teachers and school leaders.

AZ PRIME aims to support districts in establishing or enhancing their PBC systems for teachers, principals, and other school leaders. NIET will collaborate with AZ PRIME districts to implement a PBC system for teachers and school leaders that is based on multiple performance measures, including demonstrated improvements in student academic achievement. Each district will establish a PBC Committee responsible for overseeing, communicating, and implementing an enhanced PBC system as part of the AZ PRIME initiative. The committee will be provided with support in developing a fair compensation structure for teachers, principals, and other school leaders in the district. The committee will be responsible for determining additional performance measures that will be used to differentiate compensation levels. These measures may include bonus pay for effective teachers, principals, or school leaders in hard-to-staff schools or high-need subject areas; recognition for teachers who take on additional roles or responsibilities like teacher leaders; or acknowledgment of exceptional teaching and leadership skills coupled with content mastery.

By implementing the TAP System, which enhances systems and processes for educator observation, evaluation, and professional growth, districts can establish a direct connection between compensation and diverse measures of performance. Regular examination of educator evaluation and PBC data will ensure that all teachers and school leaders will have equal opportunities to receive fair compensation based on their roles, responsibilities, and performance, regardless of their race, gender, and/or disability status.

5. Create a clear vision for HCMS improvement and alignment for district leaders.

In year 1, NIET will work with AZ PRIME districts to create a clear vision for a comprehensive, sustainable HCMS that incorporates the aforementioned strategies 1 through 4. This work involves 1) assessing district structures and creating a plan for aligning elements of HCMS to district goals; 2) strengthening evaluation process to produce valid and reliable measures of teacher and school leader performance; 3) identifying key decision points where performance data will drive HCMS decisions; and 4) developing a strategic compensation plan that will advance more effective staffing structures in schools. In the first two months of the grant, NIET's Executive Director of Services alongside NIET's Senior Executive-in-Residence, who both have extensive experience supporting district leadership and strategic compensation, will conduct a contextual analysis of district HCMS structures and practices using NIET's District Instructional Framework (Appendix F4) and develop an action plan that will form the foundation of subsequent school level work.

Drawing on extensive experience in facilitating change management with Arizona school districts, NIET will strengthen district leaders' capacity to engage stakeholders in the systems change process by supporting them in analyzing and identifying needed changes in their HCMS. The process begins with reviewing district organizational structures, practices, student data

trends, principal surveys, recruitment, and retention data among others. NIET will then facilitate an on-site collaborative session with district leaders to analyze practices, identify strategies for improvement, and develop an action plan. After district leaders establish an action plan, NIET will provide follow-up executive coaching for district leaders using a “coaching the coach” model to support district leaders as they lead and coach school leaders during and after the life of the grant.

NIET will collaborate with AZ PRIME districts and schools to create a communications plan to share progress and sustain the commitment to improvement. An AZ PRIME Advisory Board will be established to oversee the project, meeting quarterly to analyze program progress and provide guidance for advancing the project. Further, NIET will provide executive coaching for district leaders to implement a multi-year plan for continuous improvement. AZ PRIME districts will use the vision established through the NIET’s district planning visit and stakeholder engagement sessions to guide the development of an overall plan for implementing the TAP System.

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

The project evaluation will be led by NIET’s Research and Evaluation Department, a department with extensive experience supporting large-scale evaluations of education programs (Appendix B). The evaluator will work collaboratively to lead a formative and summative evaluation 1) to supply grant partners with timely data to improve the project for the populations served and 2) to assess program impacts. The evaluation plan aligns with the project’s logic model stating that if programmatic structures, trainings, and supports are put in place at the district and school level to help strengthen and align district HCMS, there will be improvement in 1) teacher effectiveness, 2) school leader effectiveness, and 3) 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 track project progress and objectives.

The project's logic model (Appendix A) will be used to communicate the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes expected from the intervention. The evaluator will identify measures and data collection instruments that can be embedded into the program delivery (such as systems for tracking training session attendance and engagement) and data reporting systems drive continuous monitoring and improvement of program implementation. Tracking program progress and implementation fidelity (Research Question [RQ] 1: How is the project being implemented and to what extent is implementation sustainable?) will involve qualitative data, such as program artifacts, surveys, and interviews with partners. The TAP School Review process, which consists of classroom, ILT, and cluster meeting 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 data from the districts and the state. These data will include administrative records (e.g., position vacancies, new hires, and teacher and school leader demographics), retention rates, evaluation ratings for teachers and school leaders, and student outcomes (primarily student achievement).

The evaluation will involve quarterly update meetings to review plans, progress, and preliminary data to foster regular communication between the evaluator, key project personnel, and each district. As detailed in the evaluation plan, the evaluator will provide timely summaries of findings from program implementation and impact data analyses. Monthly meetings with the project director will discuss program data and artifacts, while educator effectiveness and student achievement data will be examined and shared with AZ PRIME districts and other key personnel annually. At the conclusion of the grant, the evaluator will assess the overall accomplishment of goals and conduct a thorough analysis of lessons learned.

NIET and AZ PRIME districts will disseminate reports locally, statewide, and nationally through presentations, professional conferences, academic journals, and print and online media. **Locally**, NIET and AZ PRIME districts will establish quarterly communications to monitor progress, address any challenges, and share project results. NIET's communications team will work with AZ PRIME districts to promote schools' success in local media. Ongoing communications efforts will raise awareness, understanding, and support for the PBC and educator evaluation systems across stakeholders. In addition, districts will disseminate information through their newsletters, websites, and other public forums throughout the year (Appendix F8). **Statewide**, information about project implementation and findings will be disseminated through collaborative presentations at regional meetings to engage partners and stakeholders (e.g., Southwest Educational Research Association, Arizona Department of Education ESSA Conference). **Nationally**, results will be shared 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), professional conferences (e.g., American Educational Research Association, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Teacher Leadership Conference), and meetings with policymakers and legislators. NIET has extensive experience sharing 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

NIET will serve as the fiscal agent for the proposed TSL grant. NIET has served successfully as the fiscal agent for multiple federal and state grants and will utilize these experiences to implement the proposed grant’s clearly defined responsibilities and milestones on time and within budget. Table 1 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 1 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 includes the principal investigator (PI), executive director (ED), project director (PD), senior specialists (SS), research team (Research), and local education agencies (LEAs) which include the school and district leadership team members. The submitted budget narrative provides the cost details. NIET’s leadership and budget teams are well experienced in managing and executing large-scale projects on time and within budget.

Table 1. Milestone and Key Tasks Summary

Milestones (bold) Key Tasks to meet each milestone (connection to Strategy 1-5)	Responsible Parties	Quarter			
		1	2	3	4
Year 1 - Milestones and Key Tasks					
Complete Project Start-up					
Establish TSL Advisory Board (S5)	PI, ED, PD	✓			
Kickoff meeting with each district leadership (S5)	PI, ED, PD	✓			
Provide data-driven implementation workshops (S1-S4)	ED, PD, LEAs	✓			
Conduct strengths-based needs assessment in each school (S5)	PD, SS	✓			
Establish PBC Committee (S4, S5)	ED, PD, LEAs	✓			
Establish Project Advisory Committees and Schedules					
TSL Advisory Board meetings (quarterly) (S5)	PD, LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
PBC Committee meetings (quarterly) (S4, S5)	PD, LEAs		✓	✓	✓
Establish cluster schedule for 2023-24 (S3)	PD, LEAs	✓			
Deliver Foundational Training					
CORE Training on HCMS (evaluation, professional learning, goal setting, instructional leadership, differentiated support for new and undercertified teachers) (S1-S5)	PD, SS	✓	✓	✓	✓
NIET National Conference and Summer Institute (S1-S3)	ED, PD, LEAs		✓	✓	
Deliver Annual Coaching and Support					
Provide 15-days of school support and coaching per year (S1-4)	PD, SS	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provide district support (bimonthly) (S1)	PD, SS	✓	✓	✓	✓
Master teacher meeting (quarterly) (S2)	PD, SS		✓	✓	✓
Begin TAP Implementation for school year 2023-24					
Teacher observations, cluster meetings, ILT meetings (S1-3)	LEAs		✓	✓	✓
School leader and ILT observations, goal setting (S1-3)	LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
School Reviews (S1-5)	PD, SS			✓	
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					
PBC Committee meetings (quarterly) (S4, S5)	LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Enter PBC data into data management system (S4)	LEAs			✓	✓
Calculate PBC awards for teachers and school leaders (S4)	PD, LEAs			✓	✓
Award PBC for teachers and school leaders (S4)	LEAs				✓
Years 2 and 3 – Milestones and Tasks					
Conduct Project Advisory Committees (Hire as needed)					
TSL Advisory Board meetings (quarterly) (S1)	PD, LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recruit, interview, hire new teacher leaders (if necessary) (S3)	LEAs			✓	✓
Continue Delivering Trainings					
Quarterly trainings with master teachers (S2 S3)	PD, SS	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly trainings with school leaders (S1-3)	PD, SS	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly training to provide differentiated support for new and undercertified teachers	PD, SS	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quarterly training to foster positive school culture	PD, SS	✓	✓	✓	✓
NIET National Conference and Summer Institute (S1-3, S5)	PI, PD, LEAs			✓	✓
Deliver Annual Coaching and Support					
Provide 15-days of school support and coaching per year (S1-3, S5)	PD, SS	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provide district support (bi-monthly) (S5)	PD, SS	✓	✓	✓	✓
Master teacher meeting (quarterly) (S2)	PD, SS		✓	✓	✓
Continue TAP Implementation for school years 2024-25 and 2025-26					
Teacher observations, cluster meetings, ILT meetings (S1-3)	LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
School leader and ILT observations, goal setting (S1-3)	LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
School Reviews (S1-5)	PD, SS			✓	
Calculate and Award Performance-based Compensation					
PBC Committee meetings (quarterly) (S4, S5)	LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Enter PBC data into data management system (S1, S4)	LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Calculate PBC awards for teachers and school leaders (S4)	PD, LEAs			✓	✓

Award PBC for teachers and school leaders (S4, S5)	LEAs				✓
Complete Project Monitoring and Evaluation Tasks					
Implementation and quality assurance meetings (monthly) (S1-5)	PD, SS, LEAs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data collection (observation, survey, interview, growth) (S1-5)	PD, Research LEAs			✓	✓
Analyze data for human capital decisions (S1, S4, S5)	PD, SS, LEAs		✓	✓	

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 (Appendix B). As an organization, NIET has more than 20 years of experience implementing direct services to school districts and supporting more than 1,000 districts across the nation. NIET has a proven track record of implementing services that lead to clear outcomes including increased educator effectiveness and student achievement. Key project personnel in Table 2 below will be responsible for ensuring that project tasks are completed on time and all milestones are met.

Table 2. Project Team Key Personnel

Personnel	Qualifications & Duties
<p>■■■■■ ■■■■■ ■■■■■ <i>Chief Executive Officer</i> (1% FTE)</p>	<p>■■■■■ ■■■■■ will serve as the principal investigator (PI). He has served as a PI, Co-PI, and external evaluator for numerous large-scale grants. He will serve as an escalation point for any issues that arise in oversight of this grant.</p>
<p>■■■■■ ■■■■■ <i>Executive Director of Services</i> (15% FTE)</p>	<p>■■■■■ ■■■■■ has experience managing multiple federal grant projects and working with multiple districts across the country. She will oversee program implementation.</p>
<p>■■■■■ ■■■■■ <i>Project Director</i> (1 FTE)</p>	<p>■■■■■ ■■■■■ an Arizona-based NIET team member experienced in TAP System implementation and supporting school and district leaders, will serve as the project director. She will directly oversee the project, ensuring quality</p>

project goals and objectives are achieved on time and within budget. The project director will maintain weekly communication with key district points of contact and NIET personnel for effective and proactive management.

NIET will dedicate four senior specialists (SS) to this project to train school leadership teams and conduct regular on-site visits. These SS will work with district, school, and teacher leaders to anchor the training process. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] two current SS with deep expertise in implementing the TAP System and extensive knowledge of Arizona's state and local context including the AZ PRIME districts. In year 2, two SS will be hired. The new SS will have at least five years of classroom teaching experience, expertise in curriculum aligned to state standards, experience in mentoring, coaching, and providing professional development, and the ability to lead, train, and coach in diverse schools.

NIET will use cost-control mechanisms involving work and budget planning and systematic review to ensure the project is delivered within budget. NIET believes that detailed work and budget planning, coupled with systematic performance reviews and the ability to make necessary adjustments, are crucial for effective cost control. Actual accomplishments and costs will be compared to the planned work flows and budgets. Quarterly financial reports will be generated for the districts, allowing NIET and districts to monitor expenditures and review progress toward outcomes. The staff qualifications identified in Table 2 represent the full range of skills needed to ensure quality and timely completion of tasks.

Upon funding notification, NIET will convene an AZ PRIME Advisory Board that will include the principal investigator, project director, senior specialists, superintendents (or their designees) from each district, and potentially school and teacher leader representatives. The Advisory Board will meet quarterly to provide a consistent platform for systematic review of the

implementation status and improvement of the project. The Advisory Board will also monitor the quality of implementation of the grant activities and their impact on teachers, school leaders, and students.

Additionally, NIET will conduct quarterly meetings with each AZ PRIME district to monitor progress, ensure implementation stays on track, and address any challenges that arise. Through effective execution of this management plan, AZ PRIME will achieve its short and long-term outcomes and project objectives, including increasing the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders, and improving student academic achievement.

D. Adequacy of Resources

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

The implementation of the TAP System in AZ PRIME districts will result in positive changes to HCMS and PBC systems, creating conditions necessary for change in classroom practice. AZ PRIME will drive 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 (DLT) 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 facilitate DLT, use

observation, feedback, and school visits to create a consistent and coherent message for principals about priorities and goals.

Data and online resources will support continuous improvement. AZ PRIME districts will use evaluation data to closely integrate evaluation results with professional development through 1) the evaluation system, which produces detailed data on teacher practice and 2) master and mentor teachers, who receive training on the rubric and the evaluation process, observe classrooms, and provide job-embedded professional development. After each classroom observation, teachers receive an area of strength and an area of growth through the post-conference. School leadership teams use data to tailor professional development for individuals and groups by analyzing school-wide areas of strength and growth, grade or content area trends, and individual teacher performance, creating a cycle of continuous improvement.

NIET provides districts with personalized training, resources, and support for all educators through the EE PASS portal, an interactive web tool (Appendix F5). This expanded online resource includes tools, ideas, and practices to support school leaders and teachers to mitigate learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, promote accelerated learning, and build an inclusive and positive school culture through the integration of character education into classroom instruction. Further, NIET has resources for school and teacher leaders to build on the common language for instructional excellence detailed in the NIET Teaching and Learning Standards Rubric to support under-certified and new teachers with high-quality curriculum implementation.

Districts will have access to the data analysis functionality of EE PASS to examine teachers' scores on individual indicators of instructional practice. This analysis will guide the planning of professional learning and inform other HCMS decisions. The data analytics also support the analysis of inter-rater reliability, enabling districts to look at scoring patterns across

schools or classrooms by different evaluators. Analytics and reports also support school and district leaders in tailoring cluster meeting content, and follow-up coaching and support to address specific rubric indicators and/or subject areas where teachers require assistance the most.

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

AZ PRIME districts 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, 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 AZ PRIME districts 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 AZ PRIME districts in establishing district-level structures for delivering professional learning and coaching for school and teacher leaders. The district leadership team (DLT) will play a vital role in providing strategic support for schools by fostering collaboration among central office leaders with different portfolios or areas of focus to create coherence in school-level initiatives.

School leaders will be supported through quarterly collaborative meetings initially led by NIET and later facilitated by a DLT member. These meetings will focus on specific areas for improvement based on school visits and observations, fostering strong practices and cultivating a shared commitment to district goals while building leadership capacity. Through these collaborative meetings, principals and other school leaders will develop a more consistent approach to evaluating classroom practice, reinforcing expectations across all schools.

Teacher leaders will participate in similar collaborative monthly meetings led by NIET and a designated DLT leader. Quarterly master-teacher meetings will 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, impacting teachers' decisions to seek employment and stay within AZ PRIME districts.

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

Stakeholder support. AZ PRIME has broad support from stakeholders as evidenced by the 39 letters of support from teachers, school leaders, district leaders, community leaders, and elected officials (Appendix C). Teachers and school leaders, in particular, strongly endorse AZ PRIME for its commitment to their growth and improvement. Additionally, NIET has been designated by the Arizona Department of Education as an approved provider to support schools under comprehensive and targeted school improvement corrective action. NIET's partnerships with two HSIs in the state, ASU and NAU, offer continuous stakeholder support for teachers transitioning from pre-service to in-service teaching positions in AZ PRIME districts.

Sustainability planning. Our sustainability plan for this project begins with the first kickoff meeting with AZ PRIME districts, and will remain integral to every conversation and advisory meetings throughout the grant period. Drawing from our 20 years of implementing comprehensive reforms, we understand that sustainability requires building collective buy-in, creating capacity through intentional training and support, increasing educator skills and student growth, and establishing financial sustainability. To demonstrate their commitment to sustainability, AZ PRIME districts are providing 50% in-kind matching contribution (Budget Narrative and Appendix D: Match Intent and Ability Letter), which includes restructuring the school day, personnel time and effort, implementing the AZ PRIME HCMS, and preparing for

financial sustainability from day one. Further, the three initial AZ PRIME districts demonstrate a financial commitment through funding teacher leader positions and will continue to review other expenditures to reallocate funds as the improvements supported by the project show impact.

After the initial three years, AZ PRIME school and district leaders will have developed instructional capacity among the faculty, allowing districts to reduce the number of master and mentor teachers needed while maintaining the TAP System strategies. NIET's support will intentionally lighten as districts build their own training capacity. As a result, implementation costs will decrease after the project period, contributing to fiscal sustainability. Additionally, by the end of the grant period, districts will have established programmatic structures based on the AZ PRIME training, coaching, and support provided by NIET. These structures will be firmly established, integrating and sustaining best practices into everyday practices.

State-level funding. Compensation for teacher leader roles is a core strategy in the state's plan and is an approved use of state funds for schools in need of improvement. AZ PRIME districts are committed to drawing upon these state funds and reviewing existing uses of local, state, and federal Title I and II funds to continue implementing the best practices learned from the training and support provided through this opportunity. These sustainability strategies will enable districts to integrate HCMS improvements into budgets, policies, and, most importantly, their everyday practices, fostering cultural shifts towards continuous improvement and high expectations.

Overall, AZ PRIME will bring lasting systemic change to districts, enhancing current teacher and school leader effectiveness while attracting and retaining qualified educators. By creating equitable access to effective educators and driving student academic growth, AZ PRIME will serve as a model for other Arizona districts and beyond.