

## A. Significance

1) **Promising new strategies.** ■ **Absolute Priority 5:** In line with the U.S. Department of Education's (US ED) call to action, "Raise the Bar: Lead the World," Iredell-Statesville Schools (I-SS) in North Carolina is proposing *REIMAGINE: Recruiting diverse Educators and Investing in Micro-credentialing for Assistants to close Gaps and Increase the Number of Effective educators*. *REIMAGINE* aligns with US ED's Achieve Academic Excellence focus area by promoting more and better individual and small-group support for students<sup>1</sup> and the Boldly Improve Learning Conditions focus area by providing professional development for teachers and specialized instructional support personnel<sup>2</sup> through evidence-based micro-credentials for Teacher Assistants (TA) and Beginning Teachers (BT) to increase their skills and competencies to work with students. ■ **Absolute Priority 5(a):** Our innovative design ❶ implements 3 existing evidence-based micro-credentials (Assessment for Instruction, Classroom Leadership, Culture and Diversity), ❷ creates and delivers 3 elementary and secondary evidence-based, field-initiated, expertly designed Exceptional Children (EC) micro-credentials designed for TAs and BTs (Co-Teaching, EC Law and Paperwork, Classroom Management), and ❸ provides individual coaching based on the participants' needs. ■ **Absolute Priority 5(b)(1):** We will promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunities for underserved students in our target elementary (East Iredell, NB Mills, Third Creek) and middle (East Iredell, Third Creek) schools in our highest-need, hard-to-staff feeder patterns. ■ **Absolute Priority 5(b)(2)(ii):** *REIMAGINE*, as our name implies, is our response to assessing and examining the inequities and inadequacies in our highest-need schools and implementing innovative responses that draw from existing research (i.e., WWC Practice Guides and High-Leverage Practices in EC) and resources (i.e., TAs) and new resources (i.e., a partner for micro-credential creation and four HBCU partners to recruit BTs).

❖***Examination of Inequities and Inadequacies:*** Teachers are the drivers of student achievement as teachers are estimated to have two to three times the impact on student achievement than any other school-related factor.<sup>3</sup> National: The teacher shortage is a national problem that continues to affect the quality of education. In 2022-23, 45% of districts had teacher vacancies with 18% having at least one vacancy and 27% reporting more than one.<sup>4</sup> I-SS: In 2022-23, we had 1,103 certified teaching positions available. On day 1, we had 178 vacancies and by day 40, 72 vacancies remained.<sup>5</sup> Our recoupment rate for 2021-22 was only 24% (122 teachers departing and only 29 new teachers attracted) lower than the state rate of 25%.<sup>6</sup> We hear frustration from students and parents as some students completed a full year without a teacher of record, being taught by different substitutes. Research shows that this type of instability within the classroom drives mistrust that results in damaged relationships between parents, schools, districts, and teachers.<sup>7</sup> While there is a need for teachers of all types, our greatest need is for teachers in specialized areas with the highest being special education, referred to as Exceptional Children (EC). National: A review of the annual Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing from 1998 to 2018, showed that over 80% of states reported special education as a shortage area.<sup>8</sup> In October 2022, out of all teaching positions in the nation, special education had the highest vacancy rate.<sup>9</sup> I-SS: In 2022, we had certified teacher vacancies for 18 EC, 18 Core, and 1 Enhancement classrooms in our K-5 schools.<sup>10</sup> High poverty and minority schools are experiencing the greatest shortages. National: In fall 2022, 57% of public schools in high poverty neighborhoods had at least one vacancy compared with only 41% in lower poverty neighborhoods and 60% of high-minority schools had one or more vacancies compared with only 32% of schools with a low-minority student body.<sup>11</sup> I-SS: 2022-23 certified teacher and TA vacancies in our target schools are higher than the district.<sup>12</sup> As of April 2023, our target schools have an average Identified Student Percentage for the Community

Eligibility Provision of 67% compared with 41% district-wide.<sup>13</sup> Our target schools are high-minority, with 74% minority, compared to 23% for the district.<sup>14</sup> Nationally and locally, we continue to see our students' assessment scores backsliding. National: The 2022-23 NAEP's long-term trend mathematics and reading assessments administered to 13-year-old students revealed sharp declines compared to the last administration in 2019-20 and from a decade ago. When compared to 2019-20, students' scores were 4 points lower in reading and 9 points lower in math. When compared to 2012-13, they were 7 points lower in reading and 14 points lower in math.<sup>15</sup> I-SS: These national proficiency trends are echoed, and often exacerbated, in our highest need schools (*Table 1*). I-SS sees the lost learning opportunities continuing to compound even as the

disruptions caused by COVID-19 appear to be dissipating. The question being asked locally and nationally is, "What do you do when there are not any certified teachers, particularly EC teachers, applying for vacant positions?" To answer this question, states are rapidly changing legislation that allows for increased

Table 1. % Proficiency		ELA		Math	
Target School	2018-19	2021-22	2018-19	2021-22	
East Iredell ES	50	36	56	43	
NB Mills ES	31	27	25	18	
Third Creek ES	42	24	53	29	
East Iredell MS	36	25	40	32	
Third Creek MS	28	26	19	8	
District Average	60	43	62	57	

flexibility in teacher preparation, certification, and licensure. In Arkansas they offer a 3-year alternative certification pathway that allows teachers to become licensed while they are working in the classroom and they allow substitute teachers, many non-degreed, to teach in classrooms all year.<sup>16</sup> Tennessee was granted federal approval to run a Teacher Apprenticeship Program that allows teachers to obtain a bachelor degree and certification while on-the-job.<sup>17</sup> Florida passed

legislation allowing non-degreed veterans to become teachers when paired with a mentor.<sup>18</sup>

❖**Innovative Response for Implementation:** In developing *REIMAGINE*, during our asset mapping, we were struck that we have an untapped resource in each school building—our TAs. Unlike many models being piloted, the use of TAs to provide continuity amid the teacher shortage is not an area that has been explored or pilot tested. TAs possess desirable qualities and experiences that veterans and those new to the field do not have. Our existing TAs already work in our buildings, they know our students and staff, and they live in our community. ■**Absolute Priority 5(b)(2)(ii):** *REIMAGINE* will improve the preparation of our TAs and BTs to work in our hard-to-staff schools, specifically our shortage area of EC, providing them with micro-credentials, coaching, and supports to enhance their skills to provide academic supports, instruction, and continuity amid the shortage. TAs completing micro-credentials will receive certificates and course credits from Richmond Community College (RCC). Through an existing articulation agreement, RCC students are then able to transfer their credits to St. Andrews University (SAU) and complete their education degree, creating a new pathway toward teacher licensure for TAs. In addition to their existing mentors, BTs will receive Praxis and licensure early career support and development. ■**Competitive Priority 1: Promoting Equity:** In partnership with RCC, our TAs and BTs will receive a certificate for each completed 30-hour micro-credential that is the equivalent to 1 credit hour. In partnership with Elizabeth City State University, Fayetteville State University, Livingstone College, and Winston-Salem State University, all HBCUs, *REIMAGINE* will recruit graduating students into our BT program and provide them with micro-credentials. This will address our local need for classroom teachers that mirror our students. Currently 74% of students in our target schools are minority<sup>19</sup> yet only 10% of our district’s elementary and secondary teachers are minority.<sup>20</sup> ■**Competitive Priority 2: Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and**

**Professional Growth:** *REIMAGINE* has been designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving our highest-need underserved students by ❶partnering with four HBCUs to recruit diverse BTs into our district, ❷providing TAs and BTs with micro-credentials in evidence-based practices and interventions, including Culture and Diversity, for all students, including EC, to spur professional growth and leadership opportunities, ❸providing BTs with alternative licensure Praxis and licensure support and TAs assistance in entering a degreed program, ❹providing our TAs and BTs with a stipend for micro-credential completion and college course credit as well as an in-kind tuition reimbursement, and ❺partnering with the University of NC Charlotte to develop a Praxis bootcamp that can be delivered internally within our district.

❖ **Dissemination and Open Licensing:** ❶Curriculum and Replication Guide: The effectiveness, successes, and challenges of our strategies will be published in a Curriculum and Replication Guide, which will guide implementation of a TA and BT micro-credentialing, recruitment and early career support program that can be scaled and replicated. Compiled by our Leadership Team, the guide will include activities and access to three developed EC micro-credentials content. We will disseminate best practices for research, replication, and sustainability so others can tailor our program to their needs, including presentations at the National School Board Association; grantee Communities of Practice; and site visits for other districts. ❷Evaluation: Our external evaluator will present findings on our website and via the Educational Resources Information Center. ❸Our open licensing plan includes our Project Director ❶publishing press releases on our website and in the community, ❷working with the evaluator to develop, refine, and publish our logic model and fidelity indexes, ❸publishing a Curriculum and Replication Guide and the content of three EC micro-credentials on our website, and ❹publishing the evaluation study on our website and via ERIC. To ensure accessibility, all documents will be 508 compliant and translated into Spanish.

## B. Quality of the Project Design

**1) Conceptual framework.** ■ *Absolute Priority 1: Demonstrates a Rationale: REIMAGINE* proposes research and demonstration activities using a conceptual framework that is undergirded by ❶ Competency-based Education (CBE) micro-credentials, ❷ What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Practice Guides and Intervention Reports and the research-based High-Leverage Practices (HLP) in the EC field, ❸ evidence-based recruitment strategies, and ❹ evidence-based early career supports. Our project rationale is provided in our logic model (*Appendix G*) and is guided by our theory of change that: If Iredell-Statesville Schools' elementary and secondary TAs and BTs are better prepared via six micro-credentials and receive early career support from individualized coaching, while recruitment is expanded, then we will see increases in educational equity, adequacy in resources, and opportunities for underserved students in our high-need, hard-to-staff schools. Evidence-informed activities are aligned to the overarching goals of our project: ❶ Improve Preparation, ❷ Expand Recruitment, and ❸ Enhance Early Career Supports.

### Goal 1 - Improve Preparation: Professional Learning

In a 2022 national survey of 8,000 teachers, teachers reported a lack of access to expertise on topics they use every day, meeting the needs of students with Individualized Education Plans and 504 plans, and joint general and special education cross-departmental trainings.<sup>21</sup> *REIMAGINE* seeks to address this assessed national deficit in educator professional learning by providing CBE micro-credentials to TAs and BTs. ❶ CBE Micro-Credentials: Micro-credentials have been found to offer a significant pathway for teachers to showcase their skills and advance learning regardless of their level of experience or degree and retain teachers by providing a formal assessment of new skills for increased responsibilities.<sup>22</sup> When documented through artifacts or other evidence of effectiveness, they support personalized learning, increase qualifications, and make credentialing

a more inclusive process.<sup>23</sup> A recent mixed methods study found that when a computational thinking micro-credential was provided to a group of pre-service teachers, the teachers’ knowledge and self-awareness of implementing computational thinking across the K-8 spectrum increased.<sup>24</sup>

② WWC Practice Guides and Intervention Reports: The three existing micro-credentials have been designed using research aligned to WWC Practice Guides (*Table 2*).

Table 2. EXISTING Micro-Credentials Aligned to WWC Practice Guides	
Assessment for Instruction Micro-Credential	Designed to increase educators’ awareness and familiarity with feedback loops, actionable feedback, validity, rubric development, scaffolding, and feedback versus feedforward. <b>Aligned to:</b> Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making Practice Guide, which outlines five recommendations rated by a WWC review panel as demonstrating a rationale to help educators effectively use data to monitor students’ academic progress, evaluate instructional practices, and make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement. <sup>25</sup>
Classroom Leadership Micro-Credential	Developed to prepare educators to identify and develop classroom leadership strategies to connect with students based on knowledge of student backgrounds and families, develop and maintain high expectations that are aligned to student needs, and demonstrate compassion with students by routine reflection and proactive facilitation of classroom leadership strategies. <b>Aligned to:</b> Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom Practice Guide, which outlines five recommendations rated by the review panel as Tier 3: Promising with strong and moderate evidence to help educators prevent and implement responsive strategies that can be used to reduce problematic behavior that is disruptive to instruction. <sup>26</sup> This micro-credential includes the evidence-based Check & Connect program,

Table 2. EXISTING Micro-Credentials Aligned to WWC Practice Guides	
	referred to as Check-In/Check-Out in our schools. Check & Connect was evaluated by WWC for the effects on secondary students and in an Intervention Report was found to have a statistically significant positive effect on students remaining in school and potentially positive effects on student progression. <sup>27</sup>
<b>Culture and Diversity Micro-Credential</b>	Designed to aid educators in developing an overall understanding and appreciation for diversity, identifying factors that contribute to viable learning cultures, re-vision the current classroom culture, be prepared to make recommendations that will enhance learning, recognize individual learning differences, and align to effective strategies. <b>Aligned to:</b> Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom Practice Guide, which outlines five recommendations rated by a WWC review panel as Tier 3: Promising with strong and moderate evidence. <sup>28</sup> A theme connected to all recommendations was the critical need for professional learning that increases educators' cultural competence to develop positive relationships and create inclusive classrooms. <sup>29</sup>

③ High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) Aligned with WWC: We will partner with Eury Consulting to create and implement three new elementary and secondary expertly designed EC micro-credentials. Eury Consulting's EC expert, in partnership with our district EC leaders, will draw from the research-based HLPs in the EC field that were developed by the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform and the Council for Exceptional Children for special education educators and teacher candidates that are rooted in the evaluated and evidenced research in WWC Practice Guides and Intervention Reports.<sup>30</sup> The practice areas include collaboration, assessment, social, emotional, and behavioral, and instruction<sup>31</sup> (*Table 3*).



**Table 3. NEW Micro-Credentials Aligned to HLPs in the EC Field**

<b>Co-Teaching Micro- Credential</b>	Will incorporate HLP 1: Collaborate with Professionals to Increase Student Success, which highlights the need for general education teachers and support staff to collaborate around student's measurable learning outcomes and facilitate student social- and emotional- learning, which includes co-teaching. <sup>32</sup> HLP 1 focuses on the effective collaborative behaviors of sharing ideas, active listening, questioning, planning, problem-solving, and negotiating to maximize student learning. <sup>33</sup> When EC educators plan and coordinate how to teach EC students, engage in co-teaching the interventions, and evaluate their effectiveness, this practice has shown a strong effect size of 0.93 on student achievement. <sup>34</sup>
<b>EC Law and Paperwork Micro- Credential</b>	Will incorporate HLP 10: Conduct Behavioral Assessments to Develop Individual Student Behavior Support Plans, which highlights the need for Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) to be completed when a student's behavior is continual, intense, or impedes the learning of themselves or others. <sup>35</sup> FBAs are often required by the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) <sup>36</sup> and our TAs and BTs will learn about the legal requirements under IDEA and how to complete all paperwork associated with these requirements. Evidence contained in seven single-case design studies on FBA-based Interventions in functional behavior support plans were found to meet WWC standards without reservations, with potentially positive effects on school engagement and problem behavior for children identified with or at risk for emotional disturbances. <sup>37</sup>
<b>Classroom Management</b>	Will incorporate HLP 7: Establish a Consistent, Organized, and Respectful Learning Environment, which highlights the need for age-appropriate and culturally

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<b>Micro-Credential</b>	responsive expectations, routines, and procedures in their classrooms coupled with appropriate and specific performance feedback. <sup>38</sup> This micro-credential builds on the WWC evaluated evidence base used in the Assessment to Instruction and Classroom Leadership micro-credentials, with a focus on the specialization needed in our EC classrooms. HLP 7 was informed by Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom Practice Guide, <sup>39</sup> which was rated by the WWC review panel as Tier 3: Promising with strong and moderate evidence to help educators prevent and implement strategies used to reduce problematic behavior that is disruptive to academic instruction. <sup>40</sup>
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④ Compensation: We will provide our TAs and BTs who complete each micro-credential with a stipend of \$500. TAs or BTs completing all six micro-credentials can earn up to \$3,000. ⑤ Day in Industry: Our TAs and BTs will participate in an annual 3-day field experience to draw connections to what they are teaching in the classroom. In addition to increasing collaboration, this provides our TAs and BTs with time to engage in work that they find meaningful. Research has found that it boosts morale and motivation when activities allow educators to make connections to teaching.<sup>41</sup>

## **Goal 2 - Expand Recruitment**

① HBCU Recruitment: We will partner with 4 HBCUs to recruit diverse BTs to our district (**CPP1**) and provide our TAs and BTs with a micro-credential in Culture and Diversity (**CPP2**) to foster a climate of cultural competence and retain recruited teachers of color. Studies find that educators of color positively impact improvements in achievement scores of students of color in math and reading, graduation rates, and aspirations to go to college.<sup>42,43,44,45</sup> Along with academic impacts, research shows social and emotional benefits for students of color when they have a teacher who

reflects their race and gender such as being less likely to have suspension, absences, and chronic absenteeism.<sup>46,47</sup> ❷ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training: In addition to the Culture and Diversity micro-credential, our partner, DreamBuilders, will provide target school staff with an annual DEI training (CPP2) to increase their cultural competence. A recent study found that a lack of cultural competence has negative effects on teachers' ability to promote learning for students.<sup>48</sup> ❸ Transfer Incentives: Through an existing grant, we will provide incentives to all BTs and TAs who transfer from a non-target school to fill vacancies in our target schools. BTs or TAs accepted for transfer will receive a retention incentive of \$500 per month. Research has shown that salary incentives can effectively increase teacher effectiveness and that a larger applicant pool can lead to an increase in new-hire quality.<sup>49</sup> ❹ Tuition: Our Board approved a tuition reimbursement of \$500 per semester for all employees, which will support our TAs on their path to teacher licensure. We will leverage this to aid in the recruitment and retention of new hires and staff. A recent survey found that 79% rated tuition assistance as important when deciding to accept a position.<sup>50</sup>

### Goal 3 - Enhance Early Career Supports

❶ Hands-on Instructional Coaching: As our TAs and BTs complete their micro-credentials, Eury Consulting will provide individualized instructional coaching, as needed, to support participants in content mastery. A recent mixed methods study found significant findings in classroom management, student engagement, and instruction when teachers had an instructional coach.<sup>51</sup> A randomized controlled trial study found that a coaching model in a high-poverty urban school resulted in significant improvements in quality of instruction ( $d = 0.52$ ), behavior management ( $d = 0.60$ ), and class wide student academic engagement ( $d = 0.41$ ).<sup>52</sup> ❷ Praxis Bootcamps and Support: Our TAs wishing to advance and BTs on a provisional licensure will need to pass the Praxis assessment to become certified teachers. In partnership with UNC-Charlotte, we will

develop a Praxis Bootcamp that can be delivered internally in I-SS. Spending time learning the material, exam format, and question styles increases the likelihood of Praxis passage.<sup>53</sup>

**2) Goals, objectives, and outcomes.** *Table 4* contains *REIMAGINE*'s goals and objectives.

<b>Table 4. Goals and SMART Objectives</b>	
<b>Goal 1: Improve Preparation: Professional Learning</b>	
<b>1.1</b>	Each year, at least 55 TA/BTs will complete at least two micro-credentials. <b>Measure:</b> Credential certification. <b>Timeline:</b> Biannually. [ <b>Note:</b> Based on their other work requirements, BTs can complete 1 micro-credential each semester of their 3 years as a BT for a total of 6 over 3 years; TAs can complete up to 2 per semester to earn a total of 6 in 1.5 years]
<b>1.2</b>	Each year, at least 90% of the TA/BTs will report high satisfaction (at least 3.8 out of 5) with the coaching support. <b>Measure:</b> Teacher coaching survey. <sup>54</sup> <b>Timeline:</b> Annually.
<b>1.3</b>	Each year, at least 80% of TA/BTs will report an increased average in general self-efficacy and teaching exceptional children. <b>Measure:</b> Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale <sup>55</sup> (alpha .83-.91) and Teaching Students with Disabilities Efficacy Scale <sup>56</sup> (alpha .92). <b>Timeline:</b> Annually.
<b>1.4</b>	Each year, at least 85% of TA/BTs will report positive job satisfaction (at least 4.0 out of 5). <b>Measure:</b> Evaluator-developed job satisfaction survey. <b>Timeline:</b> Annually.
<b>Goal 2: Expand Recruitment</b>	
<b>2.1</b>	Annually, hire at least 5 BTs of color from our HBCU partners to improve the diversity of our target school staff. <b>Measure:</b> Hiring records. <b>Timeline:</b> Annually. <b>Baseline:</b> 36.
<b>2.2</b>	Each year, at least 85% of TA/BTs will report at least 4.0 (out of 5) on culturally responsive teaching. <b>Measure:</b> Multicultural Teaching Competency <sup>57</sup> (alpha .88). <b>Timeline:</b> Annually.
<b>2.3</b>	Each year, offer a transfer stipend to our target schools to at least 5 internal district TA/BTs. <b>Measure:</b> Teacher transfer and stipend payment. <b>Timeline:</b> Annually.

**Table 4. Goals and SMART Objectives**

**Goal 3: Enhance Early Career Supports**

- 3.1** Each year, at least 90% of BTs demonstrate growth on their teacher evaluation. **Measure:** North Carolina Educator Effectiveness System (NCEES). **Timeline:** Annually.
- 3.2** Each year, at least 85% of Praxis bootcamp attendees pass the required tests. **Measure:** Foundations of Reading; CKT or Praxis math. **Timeline:** Annually.
- 3.3** Each year, decrease office discipline referrals (ODRs) by at least 150 for a total decrease of 750 (15% overall). **Measure:** ODRs. **Timeline:** Annually. **Baseline:** 4,918.
- 3.4** Each year, decrease the days lost to out of school suspensions (OSS) by at least 75 for a total decrease of 375 (16% overall). **Measure:** Days lost to OSS. **Timeline:** Annually. **Baseline:** 2,365.
- 3.5** Increase the percentage of students who report a positive school climate by 1 percentage point in Y1-2; 2 PP in Y3-5. **Measure:** Student climate survey. **Timeline:** Annually. **Baseline:** 78%.
- 3.6** Each year, increase ELA proficiency scores of students in BT classes by at least 2 PP for a total of 10 PP. **Measure:** NC End-of-Grade ELA score<sup>58</sup> (alpha .88-.91). **Timeline:** Annually. **Baseline:** 18.2% (BT classes) versus 27.6% (school average).
- 3.7** Each year, increase math proficiency scores of students in BT classes by at least 2 PP for a total of 10 PP. **Measure:** NC End of Grade math score<sup>59</sup> (alpha .89-.94). **Timeline:** Annually. **Baseline:** 15.8% (BT classes) versus 25.9% (school average).
- 3.8** By Year 5, ensure that one or more HBCUs have approval to award course credit hours for micro-credentials earned. **Measure:** Signed MOU. **Timeline:** Year 5.

**3) Project addresses needs.** In serving high-need and underserved students, *REIMAGINE* has been designed using leading evidence in the field to ❶ increase TA and BT retention and job satisfaction, ❷ improve school climate, ❸ improve academic achievement, ❹ increase confidence

and efficacy to teach EC students, and ⑤ increase infrastructure for incoming TAs and BTs to receive micro-credentialing support through multiple IHE partners (*Table 5*).

Table 5. Identified Needs and Aligned <i>REIMAGINE</i> Strategies	
Need: Qualified EC Teachers	<p><b>Strategies:</b> <i>REIMAGINE</i> will target TAs and BTs who are or will be working with our students with disabilities who attend high minority, high poverty, and low performing schools. In providing our TAs and BTs with six evidence-based micro-credentials and individualized instructional coaching, we will lay a strong foundation for improved student learning. For example, one key skill learned in the <i>Assessment to Instruction</i> micro-credential is the development of rubrics to increase feedback. Well-designed rubrics for use in the classroom have been found to establish clear expectations for all students, particularly underrepresented students.<sup>60</sup> Rubrics also provide differentiation for our EC students.<sup>61</sup> Leaning into the research, the <i>Assessment to Instruction</i> micro-credential provides educators with the tenets of the Model of Collaborative Rubric Construction and will encourage our TAs and BTs to collaboratively work with EC students to develop rubrics for assignments, providing the ‘why’ behind the key criterion and rating scale for the assignment.<sup>62</sup></p>
Need: Diverse Educators	<p><b>Strategies:</b> <i>REIMAGINE</i> will develop and maintain partnerships with 4 HBCUs to recruit diverse BTs to our district (<i>CPPI</i>) and provide our TAs and BTs with a micro-credential in Culture and Diversity (<i>CPP2</i>) to foster a climate of cultural competence and retain recruited teachers of color. Educators from racially diverse backgrounds help students of color advance and enroll in rigorous coursework, hold higher expectations, and lessen</p>

**Table 5. Identified Needs and Aligned *REIMAGINE* Strategies**

	students being referred to special education. <sup>63,64,65,66,67</sup>
<b>Need: Early Career Supports</b>	<p><b>Strategies:</b> <i>REIMAGINE</i> will provide enhanced early career support (TA and BT coaching and Praxis bootcamps) and subject-specific professional learning (evidence-based micro-credentials) that fosters a positive school climate and teacher leadership. A recent study found that teachers are more likely to be retained when they receive early career supports in subject-specific PD.<sup>68</sup> A recent review of 44 studies focused on coaching for educators found that the pooled effect size on student academic achievement was .18 standard deviations.<sup>69</sup> Teaching is a social career and educators thrive in environments where peer collaboration is offered to hone their skills, receive open feedback, and deepen their relationships; fostering a positive school climate that shares the values of trust, respect, and commitment.<sup>70</sup></p>

### C. Quality of the Project Personnel

#### 1) Applications from those traditionally underrepresented; qualifications of key personnel.

❖ ***Diversity and Inclusion Hiring and Advertising Practices:*** Driven by a respect for diversity and a desire for inclusion, I-SS set a lofty goal in our 2025 Strategic Plan with a focus on diversity in hiring. “By June 2025, increase the diversity of staff 5% and decrease the teacher turnover rate (6.6%) by 2.5%”.<sup>71</sup> Our strategies to obtain this goal include targeted recruitment, offering the Beginning Teacher Support Program, DreamBuilders, and the implementation of a Bonus Plan Task Force.<sup>72</sup> Our Board approved a partnership with DreamBuilders to increase equity and inclusion in our target schools’ recruitment and hiring and via the implementation of best practices.<sup>73</sup> In partnership with DreamBuilders, I-SS has developed and implemented a recruitment

plan at IHEs, and held six districtwide trainings on equitable practices, biases, and inclusion.<sup>74</sup> *REIMAGINE* will expand our recruiting partnerships with four HBCUs (*CPP 1*).

❖ ***Key Personnel, Leadership Team, and Consultants:*** All key job descriptions and Leadership Team and consultant resumes are in *Appendix B: Resumes and Job Descriptions*. ***Key Personnel:***

❶ **Project Director:** A full-time, grant-funded master's level Project Director will lead *REIMAGINE*; ensure fiscal management; communicate with personnel, independent evaluator, partners, and the program office; adhere to the grant timeline; meet program milestones; lead sustainability planning and the Leadership Team; and participate in Executive Cabinet meetings.

❷ **REIMAGINE Coordinator:** A full-time, grant-funded bachelor's level Coordinator will provide professional learning coordination to aid elementary and secondary TAs and BTs in micro-credential and early career support including Praxis support, coaching, and mentor assignment.

❸ **DEI Recruiter:** A full-time, grant-funded master's level DEI recruiter will lead recruitment efforts to increase underrepresented students in our BT program; work closely with our HR staff to learn of the schools with the greatest need; work with existing partners and forge relationships with new partners; attend IHE hosted job fairs; and be a referral source for TAs desiring to become a teacher. ***Leadership Team:*** Meeting monthly, this team will be comprised of I-SS executive staff.

❶ **Dr. LeVar Mizelle**, Chief HR Officer, and ❷ **Jill Parker**, Executive Director of HR, will serve as co-advisors providing project direction, including guiding operations management and accountability as co-chairs of the Leadership Team. With a Doctorate in Education, LeVar has over 20 years in education. He will serve in the Project Director role until a candidate is hired. With a Master in Executive Leadership, Jill has almost 20 years of experience in I-SS. Our co-advisers will provide guidance on inclusive hiring practices, updates on vacancies, and approval of all employment-related marketing materials. ❸ **Laura Elliot**, Director of Accountability, Testing



and Student Information, will provide aggregated and disaggregated data to the external evaluator, Project Director, and Leadership Team. With a Bachelor in Business Administration, she has over 26 years of experience providing data support. ④ Jonathan Ribbeck, Chief Elementary Academic Officer, will provide support and insight into the needs of our target elementary schools. With a Master of School Administration, Jonathan has over 20 years of experience in education. ⑤ Kelly Cooper, Chief Secondary Academic Officer, will provide support and insight into the needs of our target middle schools. With a Master of School Administration, Kelly has over 20 years of experience in education. ⑥ Rhonda McClenahan, Executive Director of EC, will provide expertise in designing and aligning the new EC micro-credentials to the needs of I-SS educators and students. With a Bachelor in Special Education and Master in School Counseling, she has over 29 years of experience in education with 11 years in EC positions. ⑦ Danielle Dixon, Director of EC Educational Programming, will provide expertise in designing and aligning the new EC micro-credentials to the needs of I-SS educators and students. With a Master of Special Education, Danielle has 8 years of experience in working with and directing services for EC. **Consultants:** ① Dr. Eury, founder of Eury Consulting, will create micro-credentials and provide individual coaching for our TAs and BTs. With a doctorate in education, he has over 50 years of experience in public schools and higher education. ② Dr. Dulin, of Eury Consulting, will provide expertise in the development of the EC micro-credentials. With a doctorate in education, he has over 30 years of experience in education as a TA, classroom teacher, EC assistant director, and EC director. ③ Dr. Page, a lead evaluator at The Evaluation Group, will provide expertise in evaluation. She has over 20 years of experience evaluating federal grants including current and prior EIR grants. Dr. Page earned a Ph.D. in Family Studies and Human Development. ④ Christy Derrick, an evaluator with The Evaluation Group, will provide expertise in the evaluation. With a Master of

Public Health, she has experience in educational program evaluations including a current EIR.

#### D. Quality of the Management Plan

**1) Adequacy of the management plan.** ❖**Management Structures:** We designed *REIMAGINE* with structures to monitor activities and ensure fidelity. Our **❶ Leadership Team (LT)** will be comprised of our co-Project Advisors (PA), Project Director (PD), *REIMAGINE* Coordinator (PC), Chief Elementary and Secondary Academic Officers, Executive Director of EC, and Director of EC Educational Programming. This team will meet monthly during the start-up, and quarterly thereafter to provide fiscal and programmatic oversight to guide implementation, including hiring staff. **❷ Advisory Council:** To ensure we maintain the active involvement of our partners and stakeholders, we will convene an Advisory Council quarterly comprised of our Leadership Team, representatives from each partner, principals, and parent and student representatives. Our HBCU partners, ECSU, FSU, LC, and WSSU, will provide guidance on effective strategies in diverse educator recruitment. Other IHE partners, UNC-C, RCC, and SAU, will provide guidance on best practices in teacher preparation program design and incentives. **❸ Consultants:** Eury Consulting, DreamBuilders, and The Evaluation Group, will provide expertise in micro-credential development, coaching, professional learning in diversity, equity, and inclusion, program evaluation, and capacity building. ❖**Timeline:** *Table 6* includes a timeline of activities.

Table 6. <i>REIMAGINE</i> Management Plan		
Task	Responsibility	Timeframe
Year 1 Initial Planning Activities (10/23-12/23)		
Revise recruitment materials and work with HBCUs	PA, PD, HBCUs	10/23
Advertise/hire Project Director, Coordinator & Recruiter	PA, PD	10/23-12/23
Procure contractual professional learning providers	PA, PD	10/23

<b>Table 6. REIMAGINE Management Plan</b>		
<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Begin monthly Leadership Team (LT) meetings	PA	10/23, monthly
Complete management and evaluation plans	PD, Evaluator	11/23
Compile baseline data for program objectives	Evaluator	11/23-1/24
Start the Institutional Review Board process, if needed	Evaluator	12/23
Purchase implementation supplies and technology	PD	11/23, ongoing
Develop Praxis Bootcamp with UNC-C	PD, PC	11/23-3/23
Develop new EC micro-credentials for 06/24 launch	Eury, EC staff	11/23-5/24
Develop TA and BT marketing materials	PD	11/23, ongoing
Assess progress towards meeting goals and update LT	Evaluator	1/24, quarterly
Confirm partners and convene Advisory Council	PA, PD, Partners	1/24, quarterly
Attend project director meetings and webinars	PD, PC, Recruiter	TBD
<b>Year 1 Implementation Activities (01/24-09/24)</b>		
Provide in-kind retention and micro-credential stipends	PD	1/24, monthly
Collect data for program objectives	Evaluator	1/24, quarterly
Launch micro-credentials and coaching	Eury, PD	1/24, 6/24 (new)
Develop BT marketing materials	PD, Recruiter	1/24, ongoing
Provide in-kind tuition reimbursement	PD	3/24, ongoing
Begin Praxis bootcamps for BTs/TAs	PD, PC	4/24, annually
Host DEI training and coaching	PD, DreamBuilders	5/24, ongoing
<b>Year 2-5 Implementation (10/24-9/28)</b>		
Continue and refine project activities from prior year	All	10/24, ongoing

Table 6. <i>REIMAGINE</i> Management Plan		
Task	Responsibility	Timeframe
Collect and compare post-data to baseline data	Evaluator	10/24, annually
Complete annual performance report	PD, Evaluator	10/24, annually
Kick off sustainability planning	LT, PA, PD	10/24, ongoing
Complete and publish the replication guide	PD, LT	9/28
Complete closeout and final performance report	PD, Evaluator	By 12/28

### E. Quality of the Project Evaluation

1) **Evaluation will produce evidence that meets WWC standards.** The Evaluation Group (TEG) will serve as our independent evaluation firm. TEG has over 35 years of experience conducting more than 300 evaluations and research studies, including 14 former or current EIR/i3 grants. TEG has both personnel and experiential capacity to conduct a rigorous, objective evaluation making them highly qualified to serve as our independent evaluator. TEG’s multidisciplinary team has expertise in all evaluation areas including, creating and using project-specific, quantitative instruments and qualitative data collection techniques, and designing studies that meet the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards.<sup>75</sup> The evaluation will be led by Dr. Melissa Page and Christy Derrick, MPH who both have over 20 years of experience in designing pragmatic approaches to evaluation including EIR experience. They seamlessly embed equity, diversity, inclusion, and social change into all evaluation work and are passionate about using the process of evaluation to impact educational outcomes. ❶ We will employ a rigorous, longitudinal, quasi-experimental design (QED) that **meets WWC 5.0 evidence standards with reservations** to provide a **moderate level of evidence** demonstrating the effectiveness of the *REIMAGINE* model to impact student short-term suspension (per 1000) rates. Our confirmatory research question:

What is the effect of up to four years of *REIMAGINE* on the rate of short-term suspensions (per 1000) in treatment schools? Treatment and comparison schools will be matched 1:5 using nearest neighbor propensity score matching (PSM) without replacement to help ensure baseline similarity in annual suspension rates. The PSM will include key exogenous school-level covariates for free and reduced lunch percentage (FRL), minority percentage, percentage English Learners (EL) and percentage of students with a disability (SWD). The pool of possible comparison schools will include other schools in I-SS and all public NC schools from 114 districts operating as “business-as-usual.” An a priori power analysis<sup>76</sup> (*Appendix J*) indicates our study has enough power to test for statistically significant program effects on suspension rates (MDES = .099,  $\alpha$  = .05, power = .80). Before matching, we will remove any schools that have worked with our partners (DreamBuilders and Eury Consulting) to ensure comparison schools were not exposed to our intervention components. Outcome data for the QED will be collected annually and analyzed as a pooled sample after four years using a 2-level model with students (level 1) nested in schools (level 2). Effect sizes will be computed during the final year. The impact model is below:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Treatment}_j + \beta_2 \text{SuspensionBaselineRate}_j + \beta_3 \text{FreeReducedLunch}_j \\ + \beta_4 \text{MinorityStatus}_j + \beta_5 \text{EL}_j + \beta_6 \text{SWD}_j + \mu_j^{\text{Schools}}$$

Table 7. Summary of Design Parameters for Confirmatory Studies	
Parameters	Study Design: QED
School Level	Elementary – Middle (Grades K-8)
Unit of Analysis	Students nested in Schools
Sample Size	30 schools (5 <i>REIMAGINE</i> , 25 comparison)
Confirmatory Outcome(s)	Short-term suspensions (STS) rate (per 1000)

Table 7. Summary of Design Parameters for Confirmatory Studies	
Parameters	Study Design: QED
<b>Propensity Score</b>	Baseline STS rate, % of students receiving FRL, % of students who are
<b>Matching Covariates</b>	minorities, % EL, % of SWD
<b>Statistical Analysis</b>	Two-level HLM model with students (level 1) nested within schools (level 2); annual data collection and analysis of pooled sample after four years
<b>MDES</b>	.099, alpha .05, power .80 ( <i>Appendix J</i> )

② *REIMAGINE* will assess two exploratory questions focused on the beginning teacher interventions. Our exploratory studies will be within district analyses comparing student academic achievement in English (ELA) and math using standardized scores from yearend mCLASS (K-2) or NKT math (K-2) benchmarks or NC End-Of-Grade ELA and math assessments (3-8) for students in BT classrooms in our treatment schools and BT classrooms (hired at the same time) at non-treatment district schools. Propensity score matching will include the following: school level (% FRL, minority, EL, and SWD) and teacher level covariates (gender, race/ethnicity, BT year) from our sample of 31 comparison schools. An important sub-analysis for our BT study is the academic achievement of students of color when their teacher is also a person of color. Using descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and hierarchical linear modeling, the academic achievement data collected from students of BTs (treatment and comparison) will be analyzed to determine the outcome effects with disaggregate analyses focusing on gender, ethnicity, EL, and SWD. Our confirmatory and exploratory studies will include all four program years. A final evaluation report will be submitted through the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and biannual reports will be submitted to US ED. TEG will secure third-party Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to engaging with or conducting any data collection from participants. After IRB

approval, TEG will facilitate monthly meetings with the grant team for continuous improvement and to build consensus on the critical evaluation questions, analysis methods, instruments, data collection protocols, and reporting formats that will define the evaluation. TEG will work with the external TA provider to refine and finalize the evaluation design and submit the study design to the Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies (REES). ③ Quantitative data include: school demographics, discipline, and suspension instructional days lost; short-term suspension rate (per 1000) baseline and outcome data; academic data: mCLASS and NKT (K-2), NC EOG ELA and math (3-8); micro-credentials earned and stipends paid; district transfers and diverse hires from HBCUs; training attendance; coaching survey results; Praxis scores; NCEES teacher evaluations; school climate survey; multicultural survey; and teacher self-efficacy surveys (reliability reported in *Table 4*). mCLASS, NKT, and EOG standardized scores and the self-efficacy and multicultural surveys are valid and reliable, thereby meeting WWC 5.0 design standards. ④ Qualitative data includes interviews, focus groups,<sup>77</sup> and open-ended survey items. We will seek input from teachers about the diversity training, and from our TA/BTs about the micro-credentials earned and usefulness to classroom instruction. We will query these groups about successes and challenges to allow for replication in other schools or districts. Qualitative analysis will be guided by code development,<sup>78</sup> informed by literature, stakeholder panels,<sup>79</sup> and member checking<sup>80</sup> and will provide a rich context to interpret our data. The constant comparative method will be used to increase credibility of results. Each data collection process will stop when we reach saturation.<sup>81</sup>

**2) Performance feedback and assessment of progress.** Our QED will use a mixed-methods<sup>82</sup> approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data sources (*Table 4*) from multiple reporters for triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the evaluation. In concert with interim performance monitoring based on the measurable thresholds in *Table 4*, quarterly reviews

of the logic model and our fidelity index will provide data to gauge early impact, suggest program revisions, and identify unintended outcomes. Formative data includes the outputs in our logic model and progress towards outcomes. TEG will facilitate monthly project meetings to discuss implementation progress. Performance and fidelity results will be reported across the project and by school. Findings will be communicated via quarterly, mid-, and end-of-year reports. Survey snapshots will present findings related to specific components. Prior to implementation, the evaluation will be finalized by meeting with all partners for input of the planned assessments and program components. Identification of barriers and facilitators to implementation through annual focus groups will lead to timely adjustments. After selecting comparison schools, we will request that each principal complete a survey to assess whether comparison schools received similar interventions. Schools that indicate similar strategies will be replaced by another school so that comparison schools have a fidelity index of zero (no treatment). Our evaluation questions include: To what extent ❶ Have the program activities been implemented with fidelity? ❷ Has *REIMAGINE* effectively integrated micro-credentials and coaching to support TA/BTs especially with teaching EC and children of color? ❸ Have program components led to successes or challenges? ❹ Are components of *REIMAGINE* suitable for replication in other schools?

**3) Evaluation articulates components, mediators, and outcomes.** Our evaluation plan includes a logic model<sup>83</sup> (*Appendix G*) that provides a theoretical foundation to guide the design, evaluation, and interpretation of findings. The model articulates key components (micro-credentials, coaching, DEI training, recruitment, Praxis bootcamps), mediators/outcomes (improved teaching pedagogy, increased staff diversity and culturally responsive teaching, increased teaching efficacy, decreased referrals and suspensions), and long-term outcomes (increased job satisfaction and retention, improved school climate, increased academic achievement, and an infrastructure for course credit



for micro-credentials). TEG will comply with required reporting, incorporate IRB approval, as applicable, and work with federal evaluation TA providers to fulfill EIR evaluation requirements. The process evaluation is centered around our program measures (*Table 4*) and a fidelity study which examines data collected to compare the planned versus implemented program components. TEG will develop an implementation fidelity index<sup>84</sup> (*Appendix J*) to measure *reach* (i.e., numbers of TA/BTs impacted), *dosage* (i.e., frequency of services), *quality* (i.e., effectiveness of strategies), and *responsiveness* (i.e., coaching satisfaction). Thresholds have been established a priori based on baseline data, scaling targets (*Table 4*), and input from subject-area experts. Component fidelity scores will be summed to compute an overall fidelity score. The fidelity index provides valuable information for sustainability and replication as it recognizes the importance of avoiding program drift and connects implementation to outcomes and impact. Our innovation includes supporting our TA and BTs by providing research based professional learning using WWC Practice Guides and High Leverage Practices in EC, diverse recruitment from four HBCU partners, and career supports to enhance teaching. Through *REIMAGINE*, we will test and study using micro-credentials, course credits, and Praxis bootcamps to support full licensure for our TAs who are seeking licensure or teachers with an alternative license to improve the preparation, recruitment, and early career support and development of educators in shortage areas and hard-to-staff schools. Using our existing TAs and recruiting diverse BTs from HBCU partners, our program will then provide diversity training for the whole school and coaching and supports for TA/BTs to improve self-efficacy and culturally responsive teaching. Our study results will add to the literature for innovative ways to recruit and support TA/BTs using micro-credentials supplemented with coaching as an effective method for transferring knowledge into pedagogy and examining the impact on academic achievement for students of color and students with disabilities.