



**PROJECT NARRATIVE &
RELATED APPENDICES**

Submitted on July 12, 2024

Executive Summary

The Interdistrict School of Arts and Communication (ISAAC) is in the heart of New London, Connecticut, and attracts students from throughout southeastern Connecticut, with 74% from New London. There is a high demand for enrollment, with a substantial waitlist and increased applicant pool. ISAAC offers a diverse and inclusive learning environment, with a focus on addressing the needs of students from various backgrounds. The recent data coming from our OLSAT School Readiness Testing showed that 35% of the students entering ISAAC are in the lower 10% of students in their grade level nationwide and 75% are at least two grade levels below their peers nationwide. Moreover, according to AimsWeb data, only 7% of incoming students achieved goal or above in mathematics and 15% in ELA respectively as compared to their peers nationwide. Receiving a group of incoming students earlier to provide the necessary interventions will improve these students' data results immensely. The school's reputation for providing high-quality education is spreading, and the community supports the school's expansion to include upper-elementary grades four and five and increase attraction to rural communities.

The outstanding staff at ISAAC has developed a comprehensive and engaging curriculum for grades 6-8, focusing on core subjects, supplemental subjects, and cross-curricular experiences. ISAAC is proud to offer not only core subjects but STEAM focused subjects like marine science, aquarium science, theatre, and dance. The curriculum is aligned with state standards and emphasizes student growth and achievement. In our expansion project we look forward to extending these learning opportunities to the fourth and fifth grade. The school has seen improvements in student performance on state testing, district assessments, and Accountability SPI rankings. The Board of Directors is independent and plays a crucial role in supporting the school's mission, programs, and expansion. At ISAAC, we cannot wait to offer our top tier educational experience to fourth and fifth graders.

SECTION 1: Board Capacity and Governance Structure

Section 1.1.a: The ISAAC Board of Directors is a diverse, engaged, and highly committed group of individuals. The Board includes individuals from various industries, talents and demographics that are relevant to ISAAC's operations and programs. Their backgrounds include education, business, and community development. The composition and selection process for the Board of Directors is predicated on the established Bylaws that were updated in June 2022 (see Appendix 1). The composition of the Board consists of no more than eleven (11) and not less than six voting Directors. The Executive Director is an ex-officio Director and does not count against the total number of the Board of Directors. When an opening exists on the Board of Directors, future members shall be sought who bring the necessary commitment, skills, expertise, perspective, and qualifications, as established by the Board and delineated in the recruitment plan from the Governing Committee; a subcommittee of the Board of Directors that is comprised of two members and the Executive Director. The current Board of Directors as documented in Appendix 13 of the grant, has a vast array of experience in the fields of finance, management, development, human resources, education law, safety and security, politics, elected officials, and education leadership at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels. Several members of the Board of Directors participate in one of the four subcommittees: Executive Committee, Governance Committee, Finance Committee, and Curriculum Committee. In addition, when a new building project comes to fruition, the Board of Directors establishes an additional subcommittee of the Board titled the School Building Committee that provides oversight on the variety of financial and structural decisions needed throughout a construction project. Moreover, as part of the Bylaws of the Board of Directors, a state-certified teacher working at the school must be a member of the Board of Directors along with a caretaker of a current student at the school. These aforementioned Board members provide insight to the Board of Directors when making decisions that involve the key stakeholders of the school – students, parents, and staff.

Section 1.1.b: Although the ISAAC Board of Directors has a composition of professionals with a vast array of skills and expertise in a variety of fields, the ever-changing arena of school law and legislative bills that affect the operations and governance of the Board of Directors requires more than the knowledge or expertise of any Board member. For these reasons, the ISAAC Board of Directors engages in Board training that provides policy and law updates with the firm, Shipman and Goodwin. In addition, the Board Attorney from Shipman and Goodwin provides the Executive Director with written policy updates according to federal and/or state law and will suggest specific training for hot-button issues facing other boards throughout the country such as pandemic-related issues, LGBTQ policies, employee issues, bullying, and FOIA issues to name a few.

Section 1.2.a: The ISAAC Board of Directors has established clear policies and procedures that guide its oversight of the school. A comprehensive set of Board of Directors roles and responsibilities are included in the Board Bylaws and in Board policies that are accessible for public view on the school's website.

Furthermore, there are 21 different policies related to the Bylaws of the Board that are included in the online Policy Book. These policies for the Bylaws of the Board are clearly delineated in Series 9000 which includes Policy 9110: Role of Board and Members, Policy 9414: Time, Place, and Notice of Meetings, Policy 9418a: Public Meetings and Executive Session, and Policy 9446: Minutes for Board of Directors meetings (see Appendix 2). The Board of Directors also complies with the Freedom of Information Act Laws that exist within several policies listed above (i.e. Open Record Law).

Section 1.2.b: While the Directors set the strategic direction of the school, they are also integral to ISAAC's daily operations. The Board's Curriculum Committee continues to enhance and standardize curriculum throughout the school. The Governance Committee has systematically reviewed, updated, and proposed for approval a full set of Board policies, based on Shipman & Goodwin's models, which are posted online at ISAAC's website. The Board's Finance Committee meets separately with the Director of Finance and the Executive Director formally every month. In addition, the Board Treasurer reports to the Board of Directors every month and provides the Board with Year-to-Date Profit/Loss Financial Reports every month along with Balance Sheet Reports every quarter. Similarly, all Board meeting dates, agendas, and minutes are posted online, including a link to the meeting, posted in advance. There is a clear awareness of the Board's oversight responsibilities. ISAAC's Board of Directors is closely involved in all matters of the school, and carefully monitors progress on recent Corrective Action Plans. Board members are open to suggestions and concerns and provide constructive criticism which leads to valuable improvements. In August 2023, the ISAAC Board of Directors approved a 6-year strategic plan that includes key areas for growth including a safe positive environment, systems of excellence for business and human resources, the top choice for recruitment of students, improvement in the Accountability Index measures, improved chronic absenteeism, and full integration of STEAM (see Appendix 3). The multifaceted array of topics that includes an all-inclusive plan toward success supports the operations and development plan of the school. ISAAC's financial processes are outlined in the Business Manual (see Appendix 4) and continue to be streamlined and standardized. The accounting system has been improved to allow for better tracking of expenditures, which allows for more consistent monitoring of grant funds and planned purchases and enables more prompt completion of both the annual EFS reporting and annual audit requirements. ISAAC's budget document and process have been

standardized to present information in an actionable format while preserving Board access to underlying details. Financial reporting and operational requirements such as Annual Reports, certification compliance, safety and security plans, school security drill logs, and other mandated documents are submitted in accordance with Board policy. As previously stated above, the review of policies is the responsibility of the Governance Committee that comes from the recommendation from the Board Attorney through the Executive Director or from one of the Board trainings provided by Shipman and Goodwin Law Firm. The Annual completion of the Conflict-of-Interest Form is completed on an annual basis and is per Board Policy 9234 which requires the Conflict-of-Interest Statement to be read and signed at a Board of Directors meeting annually (see Appendix 5).

Section 1.3.a: Every member of the Board of Directors is required to engage in comprehensive Board training which is developed and provided by the Board's Attorney. The training includes the following topics: Board Roles and Responsibilities, Budget and Finance: A Closer Look, Policy: A Closer Look, Code of Conduct, Roles of Chairperson and Committees, and Board Meeting Essentials. In addition to this formal training for new Board members, members of the School Leadership Team engage in multiple Board trainings that include new policies and procedures which arise from Federal and/or State Legislative Laws. On an annual basis, ISAAC engages in a comprehensive budget process that includes teachers, members of the leadership team, and the Board of Directors. The presentation for the following year's budget is provided by the Executive Director at a public meeting of the Board of Directors on an annual basis. The presentation of next year's operating budget includes the rationale and reasoning for spending along with a comprehensive dive into each section of the operating budget including each of the sections of the budget: 100: Personal Services/Salaries, 200: Personal Services/Employee Benefits, 300: Purchased Professional Services, 400: Purchased Property Services, 500: Other Purchased Services, 600: Supplies, 700: Property, 800: Debt Service & Miscellaneous, 900: Non-operating items. The presentation of the ISAAC Operating Budget from the Executive Director is included in (see Appendix 12) of this grant.

Section 1.3.b: As previously mentioned in Section 1.1.a of this narrative, the ISAAC Board of Directors has clear criteria for the selection of members for the Board of Directors that come from the recommendation of the Governance Committee. The vast array of skills and expertise of the Board of Directors and key members of the Leadership Team are highlighted in the bios and resumes that are included in Appendix 4.15. In addition, as per the Board's Bylaws, the election of officers is conducted on an annual basis using a three-month process that includes the announcement and solicitation of officers in month one, the Board vote of the ballot in month

two, and the voting of officers in month three. These elected officers make up the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors. As explained in Section 1.2.b of this narrative, no member of the Board of Directors or employee of ISAAC has a financial interest in the school's assets (real or personal) as per Board Policy 9234 (see Appendix 5). In addition, there are a total of 12 Board policies that refer to a conflict of interest. These policies are easily accessible through the school's website with the Policy Book for the Board of Directors.

SECTION 2: School Leadership and Management

Section 2.1.a: The ISAAC leadership team consists of essential members who manage the operational components of running a school district and school. In addition, ISAAC's leadership resembles the roles found in all strong school districts to ensure that the school is within compliance with all federal and/or state laws. While the "district" of ISAAC is only one school, its members of the leadership team hold multiple roles and responsibilities to ensure that all responsibilities required by a school district are met. This means that several central office positions may be included with school leadership positions due to the size of ISAAC. The Superintendent's role is maintained by the Executive Director, the only Executive Director in Connecticut with a Superintendent certification. As per state law and Board Policy, the Executive Director is the sole employee evaluated annually by the Board of Directors. In addition to the Executive Director, other typical central office positions include the Director of Finance, Director of Facilities and Maintenance, Director of Information Technology, and the Human Resources Director who also serves as the Associate Principal and Title IX Coordinator. With the question in this section concerning the clear division of roles, the ISAAC Board of Directors and the Executive Director annually review Board Policy 2011: Board-Executive Director Relationship (see Appendix 6). This policy sets clear responsibilities and duties for the Board of Directors and the Executive Director so that the Board does not overstep its powerful role in governance and the Executive Director has the proper authority to ensure that the school's operation is not micromanaged. This relationship at ISAAC has allowed ISAAC to improve to incredible degrees by moving from the last-ranked middle school in the region to third among the 12 districts in the region.

Section 2.1.b: The ISAAC Board of Directors is only responsible for the evaluation of the Executive Director as per Board Policy. Moreover, the Executive Director conducts all evaluations of the school's leadership team. This process is according to ISAAC Board Policy 2010: Executive Director and Board Policy 2210: Evaluation of Administrators (see Appendix 7). The evaluation of administrators follows the ISAAC Performance and Evaluation Plan which includes specific language of the criteria used to evaluate each administrator and the written process for the procedures and steps used if a school leader is not performing at an expected level. This

plan is available on our website along with the aforementioned Board policies. Included in the Executive Director's contract is language that states that the Board shall evaluate and assess in writing the performance of the Executive Director at least once annually. Said evaluation and assessment shall be reasonably related to the goals and objectives of ISAAC for the year in question. This evaluation shall follow the Board Policy 2010 which states that each year, the Board will evaluate the Executive Director following guidelines and criteria mutually determined and agreed upon by both the Board and the Executive Director. Furthermore, if the Board of Directors has concerns regarding the performance of the Executive Director, there is a formal process written in the Executive Director's contract that requires the Board of Directors to provide in writing their concerns. The Board and the Executive Director shall then meet to discuss the next steps.

Section 2.1.c: The Board of Directors has supported the vision of the Executive Director in shaping together a leadership team that is often referred to as the 'DREAM TEAM' by the Executive Director. The Executive Director comes with 20-plus years of administrative experience where he was named the Northeast Principal of the Year by Magnet Schools of America, Connecticut Principal of the Year by the Connecticut Association of Schools, and again by the University of Connecticut a few years later. Upon coming to ISAAC, he brought his Director of Information Technology, Director of Safety and Security, and Director of Finance who each have over a decade of experience in their positions at the "US News World and Report Gold Medal School" where they were all previously employed before ISAAC. The other school leadership positions were built by recruiting leaders from urban school districts where most of the ISAAC's students come from. The Principal, Associate Principal, and Director of Special Education all have over 20 years of urban middle school experience. Moreover, the five coordinator leadership positions were created by the Executive Director as a way to promote within the teacher and staff ranks. Each person in the following positions had held non-leadership positions at ISAAC in previous years. These positions include the Bilingual Coordinator, Food Service Coordinator, SRBI Coordinator, Student Services Coordinator, and Director of Elementary Education. Furthermore, 40% of these positions are occupied by leaders of color; more than three times the percentage found in most districts in Connecticut. These positions ensure that the operations and needs of the school are accomplished to exemplary degrees by an experienced and diverse group of leaders. The organization chart found in Appendix 14 details these positions.

Section 2.2.a: At ISAAC, we recognize the interplay of various socio-economic, environmental, and individual challenges that are key risk factors for our community, students, and families. To mitigate these obstacles, we have taken a multi-faceted approach when it comes to staffing and leadership structure. We

have focused on hiring highly effective teachers and planning thoughtful professional development of our teachers, while maintaining a mindfulness towards teacher retention.

Research shows that high turnover rates and less experienced teachers can impact the quality of education. At ISAAC, we understand that hiring successful urban teachers involves identifying candidates with specific qualities, skills, and experiences that align with the unique challenges and opportunities of urban education. In acknowledgement of these needs, we have recruited the best teachers for our students. We have placed emphasis on hiring teachers who have experience with students from similar backgrounds, thus demonstrating a cultural competency around understanding diversity; who believe in student potential and that all students can achieve with rigorous instruction; and who have a long-term dedication to serving our students. To ensure that we have recruited the best teachers, we have offered them competitive pay and contracts and can continue to do so through thoughtfully maintaining a sustainable budget.

We also understand that minimizing teacher turnover rates drastically impacts our students' success and the building of a high-quality fourth and fifth grade program. At ISAAC, we believe that teacher retention must take on a varied approach that addresses both the professional and personal needs of teachers and continue to remain focused on how best to keep the best teachers. We place a large emphasis on having a supportive leadership team and positive school culture. Beyond this we value teacher autonomy and empower our teachers. Additionally, to ensure retention of our teachers, we have put a focus on continuing to create professional development opportunities that focus on collaboration, content, pedagogical skills, innovation and reflective practices. These professional development opportunities are planned to be ongoing, collaborative, and embedded in the daily work of teachers as they already are in our sixth through eighth grade model. Finally, at ISAAC we also focus on a strong work-life balance through ensuring that teachers have a manageable workload and adequate planning time. By addressing these areas, we know we create a supportive and fulfilling work environment that encourages teachers to stay and thrive at ISAAC.

Section 2.2.b: ISAAC's leadership team has emphasized creating strategic operating plans that are clear and support our educators' professional growth and their well-being and retention. This has been done through many successful measures in our sixth- through eighth-grade model. We feel confident that through building upon ISAAC's solid foundation, our fourth and fifth grade model will excel as well. We have strategically created plans around professional learning communities, instructional coaching, professional development, school-wide protocols, and culture and climate.

At ISAAC, we believe that having a supportive leadership team directly correlates to teacher success and well-being. We have an administrative team who provides clear, supportive leadership and fosters a positive school culture through creating a collaborative and supportive work environment where teachers feel valued and respected. Our leadership team implements policies and practices that address systemic inequities and create a more equitable learning environment for all. This includes small class sizes, behavioral support through an active school counselor and two MSWs, and continual professional development on how to better support urban learners. The leadership team is mindful of establishing school-wide protocols with teacher input. Safety protocols, dismissal procedures, and behavior management systems are continually reviewed, reflected upon, adjusted, and communicated via our student-parent handbook (see Appendix 8). This same approach has been taken with the establishment of our fourth and fifth grade model.

Involving teachers in decision-making processes does not end with school-wide protocols but is also related to curriculum and instruction thus showing our teachers that we value their ideas. We also allow teachers the autonomy to make decisions about their classrooms and instructional practices empowering them to push themselves professionally. To support these endeavors there is weekly time allocated for teachers to meet in professional learning communities (PLC) with their departments and with their grade levels. These meetings serve many purposes in our sixth- through eighth-grade model, and we anticipate that they will hold the same meaning for our elementary model. Within the PLC's teachers can align curriculum and instructional practices, analyze their teaching methods and student performance data to improve outcomes, and address student needs more effectively through shared strategies and interventions. The PLC meetings directly support our coaching model that is also well established. We currently have instructional and curriculum coaches who support our sixth through eighth grade teachers and we will be extending that to fourth and fifth grade as well. The intent of the coaching model is to encourage teachers to set professional goals and hold each other accountable for meeting them, work together to share strategies, discuss challenges, and develop best practices, and foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation. These two endeavors together, PLC's and instructional coaching, contribute to a positive school culture centered around collaboration, continuous improvement, and collective responsibility for student success.

Finally, at ISAAC we have placed a focus on creating professional development opportunities that directly correlate to what is relevant in our classrooms, community, and most importantly, prepare our staff for any significant challenges that could severely impact the school's ability to function, its safety, and the well-being of our students and staff. These well-developed professional development days will continue with a focus of

inclusion as we fold our fourth and fifth grade staff into the fabric of ISAAC. Such opportunities have included, or will include in the future, safety protocols in an urban school, community challenges such as trauma, food instability, and social emotional learning, how to incorporate artificial intelligence in the classroom, inclusion of special education students, and strategies to support multi language learners.

Section 2.2.c: To ensure that the expansion of ISAAC to include a fourth and fifth grade does not additionally tax our current administrative team we have identified a Director of Elementary Education. Mercedes Alger (see Appendix 4.15) is a current sixth grade science teacher but comes with extensive knowledge and experience of upper elementary having worked in upper elementary for over a decade. Her qualifications and skill set are sure to set the fourth and fifth grade expansion of ISAAC on a path to success.

Section 3: Student Demand and Community/Local/ Family Support

Section 3.1.a: The Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC) is in the heart of New London, Connecticut. Classified as a ‘small’ city, New London contains a diverse minority population, subject to the same handicaps and social and economic forces as their larger Connecticut counterparts. Although ISAAC students are recruited from throughout southeastern Connecticut, 74% of those attending ISAAC live in the City of New London. At ISAAC, our goal is to be a pillar for our community that offers the best public school of choice that can help combat many of the inequities that urban children are exposed to. Over the last four years, we have watched our waitlist increase substantially, indicating that our community is looking for a choice school of our caliber to send their children to. Our current enrollment for our existing model of sixth through eighth grade is 282 students with 219 students on a waitlist for admission. For comparison, our waitlist in 2020 was 35 students. In addition, this past year alone, the applicant pool for ISAAC grew 400% in applicants from surrounding districts. Upon opening admission to our fourth grade within twenty-four hours we had thirteen applications. Without marketing beyond our existing families, we filled 33 of 36 seats within two weeks. Furthermore, on December 14, 2023, the Connecticut State Department of Education held a public hearing at ISAAC in relation to the application for our charter renewal as part of the renewal process. Thirty-two individuals spoke in favor of ISAAC’s charter renewal with no opposition. Over half of the speakers also spoke of the need for ISAAC to expand to offer elementary classrooms. ISAAC’s reputation for offering a choice of education that outperforms surrounding schools is spreading not only in New London, but also in surrounding cities and rural areas.

Section 3.1.b: Our instructional and curriculum design is based on, not only the Common Core Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and the Connecticut Social Studies Framework, but also on data from our

formative assessments such as AimsWeb, SBAC and NGSS (see Appendix 9). One key driving force for ISAAC's expansion to 4th and 5th grades is that, when students enter our building in sixth grade, only 29% of them are performing at goal on the ELA SBAC and only 16% of them are performing at goal on the math SBAC. Through our high-quality instruction, we see our students demonstrate significant growth. This past year, in 6th grade alone, over 45% of our students met goal in ELA on the SBAC while over 38% of them met goal in math on the SBAC. Similarly, on our school-wide AimsWeb assessment, which more closely measures our day-to-day teaching, we saw only 15% of students in 6th grade ELA at goal at the beginning of the year. By our end of year assessment, we had over 23% of our students at goal for ELA, almost 50% improvement. In math, we only had 7% of 6th grade students at goal when the year started. Through our thoughtful math instruction, we were able to see our students grow to over 21% by the end of the year, three times the initial assessments. This growth has improved ISAAC's ranking from 12th among middle schools in Southeastern Connecticut to now ranking 3rd based on Next-Gen Accountability Measures for Academic Growth and Achievement (see Appendix 10). We know through offering our level of rigorous instruction, special education services, and support to students starting in 4th grade we will see them begin to close gaps thus allowing them to perform closer to their counterparts in suburban or rural schools.

ISAAC is focused on ensuring that our students and families are aligned with our high expectations and feel supported in our academic endeavors knowing that their "buy-in" is crucial to the success of ISAAC. In the 2023-2024 student survey, over 93% of students noted that the school has a clear vision about the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed and over 95% of students feel that ISAAC has set high standards for their academic performance. In comparison, in the 2023-2024 parent survey 95% of parents noted that they believe ISAAC has set high standards for their child's academic performance and that the school has a clear vision of the life skills and knowledge that their child needs to be successful (see Appendix 11)

Beyond academics, ISAAC is focused on providing a level of specialized instruction in their classroom design. With immensely positive feedback during tours and open houses, we are continuing to implement the flexible seating that occurs in multiple sixth and eighth grade classrooms. This will be our classroom model for the fourth and fifth grade expansion. Through successfully establishing flexible seating in our middle school model, we have found that it increases student engagement, student discourse, and encourages a classroom with active learning. Our current coaching model already supports teachers who have decided to take on this model and will continue to do so with our fourth and fifth grade model.

Section 3.2.a: ISAAC currently has 282 diverse students enrolled in our 6-8 grade middle school (e.g., grade 6, N = 100 students; grade 7, N = 96 students; grade 8, N = 86 students). Although ISAAC students are recruited from throughout southeastern Connecticut, 66.3% of those attending ISAAC live in the City of New London. Reflective of our small-city home of New London, Connecticut, ISAAC contains a large population of minority students, and many students of diverse academic and socio-economic learning needs. ISAAC students are 87% African American, Hispanic, or mixed race. In addition to that, 71% of ISAAC students qualify for free and reduced lunch compared to less than 40% on average state-wide. The diverse demographics of the student population consists of the following:

- 62 % Hispanic/Latino students (N =172)
- 16 % Black/African American students (N =44)
- 13% White students (N =37)
- 9 % Other (N =25)

In addition to our large population of minority students, some of ISAAC's students also have diverse academic and socio-economic learning needs. For instance, there are 17.2 % English learners (EL) (N = 47); 17.9 % students with disabilities (N =48); and 71 % free and reduced lunch (N = 197). These students are at a higher risk for learning difficulties and poor social-emotional health. At ISAAC, we have made it our mission to offer the community a school of choice that is focused on combating these risks and having our students excel.

Our projected incoming students would look like our current students because they are siblings to students that attend ISAAC. We are also continually trying to appeal to families from surrounding rural areas. We currently have 32 projected incoming students with 71.9% of them coming from New London. With our current incoming students 90.6% of them are Hispanic or Black. While 33.7% of our students are from 17 sending districts, they are of similar demographics to New London. We believe that through increasing our rural student population our students would benefit from being exposed to different backgrounds and experiences which then prepares all students for the diverse and interconnected world they will encounter in higher education and the workforce. Furthermore, the culturally diverse exchanging of ideas and experiences would lead to more well-rounded and holistic learning at ISAAC.

Section 3.2.b: ISAAC expanding to offer a fourth and fifth grade to our local and surrounding communities means families have access to a rigorous, enriching school experience earlier in their children's educational journey. As local urban elementary schools around us continue to close due to budget cuts, teacher shortages,

and schools that fail to meet code, ISAAC offers a choice to families that would otherwise have to place their children in schools with large class sizes and strained programs. Additionally, Southeastern Connecticut is 87% white while our school population is 87% minority thus offering a school of choice that can provide families with a diverse experience. With our desire to extend our program and hopefully reach rural children we will be a choice school for families that wish to broaden their child's educational journey with a diverse curriculum, more cultural diversity, and varying perspectives.

Section 3.2.c: In the state of Connecticut charter schools are required by law to attract students of low socioeconomic status, special needs, and English learners. At the Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC) we know that a diverse student population supports an enriched educational experience for all students, so we are committed to ensuring that we are not only accessible to the at-risk student population but that we maintain a racially and socio-economically diverse population of students. We do this in many ways and will continue through our school expansion. First, our charter states that 50% of students must come from New London while the other 50% of students come from all other surrounding districts. This aspect of our charter ensures that our population remains diverse. In addition to that, we are focused on having an inclusive marketing and outreach program. We consistently reach out to diverse communities to inform families about the school's programs and opportunities. To support these endeavors, we provide communication materials in multiple languages to reach non-English-speaking families, and also provide translation services as needed. Furthermore, we focus on building partnerships with community organizations to increase our outreach. At ISAAC, we collaborate with local community organizations, businesses, and civic groups to reach diverse families and encourage their children to apply. Finally, with our thoughtful, culturally relevant curriculum, extensive course options including offerings such as dance, theater, invention convention, and marine science, and our wide range of after school sports and programs that allow students to take part in anything from soccer to cooking our families and students find such success at ISAAC retention is easy.

Section 3.2.d: While ISAAC is proud of the diverse student population we serve, we hope that expanding our grades to include fourth and fifth grade will help attract rural families. When ISAAC began to offer sports and afterschool programs utilizing a grant to purchase vans was crucial in our enrollment for those programs. It allowed us to not only provide transportation to hubs for families to pick their children up but to compete in sports games as well. We know that providing transportation to a local "hub", such as a grocery store parking lot, could ensure that students from various rural districts could attend ISAAC. The purchasing of vans along

with marketing to rural areas that ISAAC can provide transportation from a centralized location for families to pick up and drop off their children that is closer in proximity to their homes would allow us to have a greater draw.

Section 3.2.e: ISAAC has a clear and compliant to C.G.S. 10-66bb admissions policy that defines our recruitment plan. Board Policy 5001: Admissions Policy is posted on our website (see Appendix 19).

Section 3.2.f: ISAAC understands that identifying, engaging, and accommodating families from various backgrounds, including English learners, students with disabilities, and students of color, requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach. We thoughtfully engage with our families through offering open houses for prospective students, providing individual enrollment tours if it benefits a family, and providing language interpreters for all occasions. We consistently communicate with families in many ways and languages. From texts, to emails, or our website and social media posts we continually interact with families. Beyond that we offer our communications in both Spanish and creole, along with Braille or other languages upon request. Our Planning and Placement Team Meetings (PPTs) are offered in person or virtually to accommodate what works best for our families. Furthermore, after seeing our attendance at parent-teacher conferences increase during COVID, we continued to offer our conferences virtually twice a year to encourage family to teacher connections. In our parent survey that we administer twice a year over 98% of our parents' state that they agree that they “often receive communication from the school whether in person, by phone, by email, or in some other way”.

Section 3.3.a: The Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC) prides itself on its diverse Board of Directors. Our Board of Directors directly supports ISAAC’s mission, purpose, goals, policies and programs, while acknowledging its strengths and needs. More importantly it is made up of community members that include but are not limited to, two of which are education professors at the local college, Mitchell College, one of ISAAC’s former science teachers, a former superintendent, a current ISAAC teacher, a current ISAAC parent, and a Director of Elementary in a neighboring district. Beyond our Board of Directors, ISAAC administration has worked hard over the two years to establish an active Parent Teacher Organization with not only parents who meet monthly with administrators but with teacher involvement as well. Together these groups play a crucial role in providing input, decision making, and the operation of ISAAC.

Section 3.3.b: At ISAAC, we have developed multiple strategies to ensure broad-based participation from the community, parents, and teachers in developing and providing feedback on our instructional models. First, we

use our established PTO and Board of Directors with our current teachers to develop and provide feedback on instructional models. This is done through established meetings and protocols like curriculum writing and revisions in our Professional Learning Communities, professional development opportunities where stakeholders can learn about instructional models and best practices, and contribute their ideas and perspectives, and our sub-committee meetings that happen throughout the school year. We have also prioritized establishing clear and consistent communication channels, such as newsletters, emails, social media, and our school website, to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged in any instructional changes that may be happening. For instance, as we have begun to transition our traditional classroom to using more flexible seating, we have maintained transparency throughout the process by sharing photos and tours and eliciting feedback from our stakeholders. Collaborating closely with our PTO has facilitated parent involvement and has ensured their voices are heard in the decision-making process. This, along with positive feedback from conversations and surveys, helps us ensure we are making impactful changes. We know that these strategies and the encouraged engagement that is a product of them have led to a more inclusive and effective educational environment.

Section 3.3.c: At ISAAC, we are continually revising and updating our website to ensure that it provides the most up-to-date information for our families. This includes our curriculum, Vision of a Graduate, course selections, and our Connecticut State School Report Card. In addition, 8th grade students and families are provided with prospective school choices for high school along with admission dates, open house, etc. A choice school night is organized by the school counselor which provides students and families with the opportunity to meet with choice school officials from surrounding area high schools.

Section 4-Instructional Practices, Student Academic Achievement

Section 4.1.a: In our sixth through eighth grade model, we have identified and created a well-rounded curriculum that includes materials that cover core subjects such as mathematics, language arts, science, and humanities. We also supplement our core content curriculum with subjects like marine science, aquarium science, invention convention, physical education, art, music, and technology. At ISAAC, we write our own curriculum with time for writing, reflecting, and revisions being built into our Professional Learning Communities meetings. Each content area follows a process of first relying on their content specific standards then developing essential questions, enduring understandings with unit goals, daily learning objectives with “Think, Write, Pair, Share” questions, and assessments. All curriculum is then posted on our website. This process has continued with the foundational writing of our fourth and fifth grade curriculum. In our expansion

we will continue to have core subjects such as mathematics, language arts, science, and humanities, as well as supplemental ones like physical education, art, and music. The materials needed to support this curriculum include textbooks and workbooks, manipulatives and learning tools which help develop complex math concepts, and hands-on science materials. Additionally, we are eager to move our flexible seating classroom style into our expansion. We have seen tremendous success with student engagement and collaboration due to this model and know that it will greatly impact our fourth and fifth grade classrooms as well.

Section 4.1.b: Our core academic curriculum has been designed to engage and challenge our students. Each unit has been built with standards at the forefront. In language arts students will experience comprehensive units that involve integrating reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities around central themes or topics. Our first unit will focus on poetry and the essential question “what inspires writers to write”. Students will read a fictional novel, *Love That Dog*, annotate classic poems, write poetry, complete comprehension assessments, and end the unit with writing a persuasive essay. This unit will ask students to analyze character traits, motivations, and development along with appreciating the use of language, rhythm, and imagery in poetry. In unit two students will grapple with the essential question “when faced with a disaster what actions define our character?”. Through reading the fictional novel *Escaping the Giant Wave* along with a series of non-fiction texts about historical natural disasters students will analyze how themes are developed through characters, setting, and plot, focus on elements like setting, plot, character, conflict, and resolution, and understand primary and secondary resources. This unit ends with the students researching a historical natural disaster and composing a choose-your-own adventure story. Unit three asks our students to investigate the essential question of “how can one person make a difference?” as they read the historical fictional novel *The Hope Chest*. This novel paired with historical non-fiction documents allows students to understand how characters drive the plot and theme, understand the genre of historical fiction and its elements and connect historical events and figures to fictional stories. This unit ends with students choosing a side, either an “anti” or a “suff” and creating a time capsule that represents the era and themes of *The Hope Chest* based on the side that they chose. Our final unit touches on all the standards and ideas that have been taught through the year by exploring the short story “An Honest Mistake” by Karen Meissner. In this unit students will hone vocabulary skills, work on reading comprehension and explore story themes while investigating the essential question “How do thoughts and actions show someone’s true character?”. This unit ends with students creating a multimedia presentation that highlights their understanding of the novel's key elements, including characters, themes, and important events. They will also reflect on how the story relates to their own experiences.

Our math units are designed to build off one another and are directly tied to the Common Core Standards for 4th grade mathematics. We start with unit one which covers multiplicative thinking including models for multiplication and division, prime and composite numbers, and comparisons and equations. Unit two investigates multi-digit multiplication and early division through arrays, ratio tables, and multiplication strategies. Unit three goes into fractions and decimals while working with equivalent fractions, comparing, composing and decomposing fractions and mixed numbers, and introducing decimals. From there students will head into unit four where they will investigate addition, subtraction, and measurement. This unit asks students to understand place value and standard algorithms. Unit five focuses on geometry while building on our students' existing knowledge around measurement. Students will measure angles, work with polygons and symmetry, and area and perimeter. In unit six our students will revisit multiplication, division, and fractions. They will explore multiplication and division strategies, line plots, and fractions on a deeper level. To end the year our unit seven will cover a review and extension of knowledge around fractions, decimals, and multi-digit multiplication. This unit will ask students to compare fractions and write equivalent fractions, work with decimals and decimal fractions, and apply the standard algorithm of multiplication.

Our curriculum plan for both science and humanities mimics that of our 6th grade in that our science and humanities units are closely aligned to not only their own standards (Next Generation Science Standards and the Connecticut Social Studies Framework) but also to the language arts standards from the Common Core Standards. This ensures that our students are getting cross-curricular experiences that increase their exposure to literature and comprehension skills. In science, our students will take part in four units over the year. Unit one focuses on the human body as a machine and allows students to explore why muscles bulge, how does your brain control your body, and what do people who are blind see. Unit two has students investigating rocks and volcanoes while unit three asks' students to look at sound waves. Finally, unit four explores energy through investigations such as what makes a roller coaster go fast, chain reactions, and where does energy come from. These units of study are supported with non-fiction texts and writing tasks to enhance our language arts content.

Section 4.1.c: The way we constructed our curriculum for the fourth grade, and eventually the fifth grade, reflects how it is done in our sixth through eighth grade classrooms. Over the past three years the teachers and staff at ISAAC have done a complete overhaul of our curriculum. The hard work that went into writing a rigorous curriculum that aligns with our population has paid off and we have seen great improvements in our assessment data. On SBAC, our statewide high-stake assessment, our ELA scores now have over 48% of our

student population performing at grade-level, which is a 33% increase from last year. In math, on the same test, 31% of our students are now performing at grade level, which is also a 33% improvement from last year. On our district assessment, AimsWeb, we have also seen great improvement due to our curriculum and instruction. By the end of the 2023-2024 school year over 62% of our students were at goal in mathematics while 81% of our students were at goal in ELA. We believe that this data greatly supports the idea that our children are growing because of our thoughtful curriculum.

Section 4.2.a: In the same way that we have watched our students' scores increase on state-wide testing and district assessments we have also seen our Connecticut Accountability SPI Rankings increase. In 2019 our SPI was 50.6 and we were ranked 934/968 out of schools. Through our constant striving for improvement and rigorous curriculum we have seen our SPI scores climb to 65.5 and our ranking move to 562/978 of all schools. This current 65.5 SPI has placed us higher than our projected score for 2028. We know that we will continue to see these rankings increase, mostly impart to our curriculum, expectations, and instruction.

Section 4.3: At ISAAC, we pride ourselves on ensuring that we prepare our students for high school and beyond. We do this through not only our rigorous curriculum and holding each student to our “Vision of a Graduate” but also through our daily practices like Accountable Talk. This classroom discussion technique emphasizes respectful, evidence-based dialogue, and offers numerous benefits for both students and teachers. At the forefront accountable talk enhances critical thinking, deepens understanding, and fosters communication skills but at a deeper level it supports equity and inclusion which some of our educationally disadvantaged students benefit from. To support our accountable talk each classroom has a Think, Write, Pair, Share activity every day. In this daily activity students think about a content specific question individually, write a response, discuss their thoughts with a partner, and then share with the larger group. This is just one type of active management that we utilize to ensure high quality learning experiences. We also utilize protocols such as “Give One, Get One, Move On”, Concentric circles, and Four Corners just to name a few. Our teachers also work closely with our special education team to ensure that our instruction is differentiated. This can end up looking like teachers using flexible groupings, tiered instruction and assignments, or providing choices when completing a unit task. Most recently we have begun training our teachers on culturally responsive teaching strategies during professional development. Through incorporating diverse perspectives and building lessons with a culturally relevant pedagogy we know we can provide an even higher quality of not just teaching but learning. These practices are well established within our sixth through eighth

grade model and will be easily supported in our expansion. Most importantly, the design of our classrooms and utilizing flexible seating directly, and positively, impacts all these practices.

Section 4.4: In our current sixth grade through eighth grade model, we have an already established plan for monitoring and assessing not only student performance but also teacher performance. Each curricular unit that is written includes mid-unit and end-of-unit assessments that our students take on Edulastic, an online assessment platform. This allows us to mimic state required high stake assessments so our students become familiar with the way they will look. Beyond that each unit also includes an end-of-unit project that assesses student understanding on the overall unit and supports our Vision of a Graduate. In addition to our content specific assessments, our students also take interim assessment blocks (IABs) multiple times a year. IABs focus on smaller sets of related concepts and provide more detailed information for instructional purposes while also exposing our students to SBAC-like questions. These scores are used to help us fine-tune instruction as they are directly related to Common Core Standards. Finally, our students also take our district assessment, AimsWeb, multiple times a year. This assessment measures literacy and math skills and provides nationally normed assessments and progress monitoring. At ISAAC, we use AimsWeb to identify learning gaps, at-risk students, and inform our daily instruction. When planning our instruction, we plan to extend these means of assessing students to our fourth and fifth grade model. Our plan for monitoring and assessing teacher performance is equally clear and is built upon the idea that continuous communication and collaboration creates an environment of open communication where teachers feel comfortable seeking guidance and sharing concerns. Each teacher is provided with thoughtful professional development to ensure that our standards and protocols are consistently being upheld. Beyond that, each teacher is placed on a routine observation rotation where they take part in scheduled and impromptu observations that are followed up with feedback and reflective meetings. In addition to that, each teacher is supported through their Professional Learning Communities and the grade-level teams where they meet regularly to reflect on their teaching practices, lessons, and assessments. The administrative team regularly attends these meetings and extends support as needed. Finally, there are multiple points for support and feedback at ISAAC. Whether a TEAM mentor for new teachers, an instructional coach, a curriculum coach, or an administrator, there are many resources to support teachers. This system will be extended to our fourth and fifth grade teachers and will be supported by naming a Director of Elementary to not add stress onto our current administrative team.

Section 4.5: Consistent with ESEA §4310 ISAAC admits students based on a lottery, does not charge tuition, and is a school to which parents choose to send their children. Furthermore, we work independently of the

public New London middle school, Bennie Dover, and in doing so have full control of many educational aspects. As previously stated, the Board of Directors' composition and selection process is predicated on the established Bylaws updated in June 2022. The Board's composition consists of no more than eleven (11) and six voting Directors. In alignment with Conn. Agencies Regs. §10-66mm-1, §10-66mm-2, and §10-66mm-3, ISAAC's Board of Directors are independent, non-voted in members. As a group of diverse members, they support ISAAC's mission, purpose, goals, policies and programs, while acknowledging its strengths and needs. For instance, our board fully supported and voted on ISAAC becoming a STEAM school. In support of becoming a STEAM school we now offer choice electives such as marine science, invention convention, and aquarium science. Additionally, we have full control of our curriculum which allows us to write a rigorous curriculum that meets the unique needs of our schools' current and anticipated demographics.

SECTION 5: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, MONITORING

Section 5.1.a: This CSP grant application is written to support ISAAC's expansion to include 4th and 5th grade classrooms, adding 52 seats to our existing 6th through 8th grades. As outlined in the uploaded budget templates, we have included only those costs which arise specifically due to the addition of grades and seats. We have carefully reviewed the guidelines and believe these costs to be "necessary, allowable, and allocable." Staff "time and effort" are allocable to the expansion of grades as this work occurs outside of the usual school year, is neither customary nor expected to continue after both grades are in place, and there is no overlap with existing grades. Staff costs are paid through contracted stipends and in accordance with the existing teacher contract (in the case of teacher time). Requested professional development is intended to create a deep educator team with skills specifically oriented to 4th and 5th grades. Classroom furniture, instructional materials, and student technology included in the CSP budget request are in keeping with existing practices and will outfit new classrooms and curricula for 4th and 5th grade English Language Acquisition (ELA), Math, Humanities and Science, plus a Special Education Resource room. ISAAC has also included budget requests for marketing development, recruitment support, and advertising in order to engage in outreach and community awareness (as outlined on page 15 of the GSCT Allowable Cost guide). Marketing and recruiting support are often out of reach for the average charter school. With the help of high-quality industry partners, ISAAC seeks to develop videos and radio spots specific to the new 4th/5th grade which will gain the attention of prospective families and staff members in the surrounding region. It is important for us to create a real buzz around 4th/5th grades because those students also become our 6th, 7th and 8th graders. Finally, we have included a request for two vans for transportation of 4th/5th grade students. We recognize that this request is out of the

ordinary, and we know that we will encounter situations such as higher-grade siblings who want to also “catch a ride.” We intend to use these vans exclusively for 4th/5th grades, no exceptions. Because each van technically holds only 13 students, we expect space to be at a premium. Our current status is that we have limited transportation for those coming from out of the district. To be able to provide transportation to even an apportion of students from outlying areas would be huge. We purchased vans for after-school programming through a federal grant and have made it work within the rules of the grant, we can do the same for the CSP grant.

ISAAC has significant experience with managing grants at all levels, including federal grants. Grant funds are separately tracked and regularly monitored, and reports provided in a timely manner. Expenditures comply with our existing procurement policy, which itself is written to comply with the federal procurement requirements at 2 CFR 200.

Section 5.1.b: To add two lower grades to our school, we must create entirely new curricula, new classrooms, and new school processes to accommodate this younger cohort. This work will occur now, in the summer of 2024, for 4th grade and next summer, summer 2025, for 5th grade. We consider this a “planning” period because it must occur before we can “implement” on Day One. The only costs specifically related to “planning” are staff costs related to a stipend for a certified 092 administrator/ teacher to act as Director of Elementary Education to spearhead and develop the mentioned details and related to bringing relevant 4th/5th grade staff together for a brief period before school starts in order to be ready for the new students when they arrive. All other items requested are more correctly considered “implementation” as they are meant to have students in their seats, with appropriate materials, and ready to learn when school starts.

Section 5.1.c: As part of the CSP grant process we have completed and uploaded a detailed CSP budget that encompasses the fiscal year 10/1/2024 through 9/30/2025, plus an allowed 90-day lookback period to cover the “planning” period discussed above. We have not included CSP budget items for years two and three, as is appropriate for an “Expansion” school.

Section 5.1.d: In this application, we have included a 5-year budget which includes the addition of 52 seats in 4th/5th grades through fiscal year 2028-2029. As a courtesy to the reader, we have included a column specifically outlining the CSP Budget request, which is not included in the FY24-25 (Year 1) budget, clearly demonstrating that the CSP grant items are not included in ongoing operational costs.

We foresee no concerns regarding sustainability. ISAAC has been in existence since 1997 and has strong policies and procedures in place to manage and monitor financial performance and sustainability (as outlined

in ISAAC's Business Manual included in Appendix 4 of this grant application). We have reported consistently positive "changes in net assets" (i.e., year-end surpluses) for the preceding four audited years (see Appendix 17).

Our five-year budget assumes reasonable increases in per-pupil revenues, based on experience and close review of recent legislative actions, to reflect the CTCSA's and others' expectation that per-pupil rates will reach 100% funding in the next three years. Our enrollment assumptions include the addition of 52 students in Year 1, and no further increase in enrollment. We have been conservative in Title grant assumptions, increasing a reasonable 2% each year. The full 5-year budget also includes Special Education (discussed further below); Food Service; and certain Competitive Grants (School Mental Health Specialist, which ends 25-26, and 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, which we assume will continue in 26-27).

ISAAC's five-year budget reflects a modest surplus in each year. This "planned" surplus is customarily shown as a separate "contingency" line in our internal budgets and allows us to be responsive to unanticipated needs should they arise. We believe that the five years shown are indicative of what we will see in the years beyond, which leads to confidence in our financial stability and sustainability. The addition of 52 seats and two new grades (4th and 5th) will be funded in future through increased per-pupil revenues from the CT State Department of Education. Our long-term budget indicates that these revenues will be sufficient to support the 4th and 5th grades well into the future.

Section 5.2: ISAAC is autonomous and self-sufficient. We do not work with a CMO and look only to our Board of Directors and leadership team for guidance and decision-making. Within this application, we have "colored outside the lines" for two items: we have included summer 2024 as a "planning" period although no planning period is contemplated for an Expansion school. It's not Implementation, and it would be improper for us to Implement without Planning, so we have called it Planning. In addition, we have requested the purchase of vans, which are a Long-term Asset not usually requested within a grant. However, we have asked for vans before (in ARP Enhancement grant, also a federal grant), we know we can make it work, and we believe vans are a key item for our ability to reach students who are not currently able to consider their future in a charter school.

Section 5.3: We have structured our chart of accounts and program classes in our accounting system to streamline grant oversight, which allows us to provide timely and consistent reports. All reports have been timely filed with the CSDE. Our annual audit is filed with the CSDE and the Federal Audit Clearinghouse before 12/31 as required.

Section 5.4.a: For the 2024-2025 school year, ISAAC anticipates 32 accepted 4th grade students coming to ISAAC. We are currently mid-way in our internal construction projects that allow for two additional 4th grade classrooms. This includes the creation of multiple offices and learning areas that were built along with several moves within the building to accommodate the new 4th grade classrooms. In addition, a new master schedule was built and adjusted to allow the 4th graders to have specials in Physical Education twice a week along with art, dance/theater, and music once a week. In addition, areas for lunch and recess were rearranged to allow for designated eating areas along with an unoccupied gymnasium space during the day for supervised recess. Currently, ISAAC Middle School has an existing physical site for students grades six through eight. Last summer, ISAAC Middle School completed a \$2.4 million expansion that included the addition of three levels within the confines of the .48 acres of land in downtown New London. The expansion included a marine science laboratory, music room, and a computer lab. As part of the expansion for 4th and 5th grade, the computer lab will be relocated for the permanent placement of one of the 4th grade classrooms. With the anticipation of an added 5th grade for the 2025-2026 school year, the ISAAC Board of Directors has taken steps to plan for the construction of three additional classrooms that will house most of the 4th and 5th grade students. Prior to the announcement of the additional seats, ISAAC had engaged in preliminary discussions with an architectural firm and the previous construction group regarding the possibility of another expansion tower next to the one just built. The plan is to construct another three-classroom building that will house the remaining three classrooms needed for the expansion. Along with the former computer lab that will permanently house one of the 4th grade classrooms, the other 4th grade classroom and the two additional 5th grade classrooms that will enter ISAAC in 2025-2026, will be housed in these new spaces. The project for the new construction project will be financed by the school and through borrowed funds from the same bank that was the lender in the last project. The anticipated cost of the project is \$1.5 million with the school borrowing 80% of the project. The additional 52 seats that ISAAC obtained from the legislature will provide the school with enough finances to pay for the mortgage of this project. This project will be funded by securing a 3rd mortgage loan from the same bank we used for the most recent addition. ISAAC will budget the use of the additional funds from the approved 52 seats to pay for the additional mortgage costs for several years to come. The current anticipated date for completion of these additional classrooms for the 5th grade is the summer of 2025. We are confident that the established spaces for the current students and the requested 4th grade students are optimal for teaching and learning and appropriate for 4th graders and staff for

the 2024-2025 school year. Furthermore, the 4th grade classroom used for the 2024-2025 school year will become a special education resource room; the 5th room for the 4th and 5th grade program.

Safety and security of the facility will remain a priority for the school with the expansion of the project. Our school has a unique relationship with the New London Police Department where two-armed safety and security professionals are located in our school. As former School Resource Officers in our neighboring district of Groton, they have tremendous experience in school safety and training initiatives that ensure the safety of our building which holds the most precious assets in our lives. Appendix 18 shows the architectural drawings of the proposed building expansion.

Section 5.5.a: ISAAC will not be contracting with a CMO.

Section 5.5.b: ISAAC currently supports at-risk youth through a combination of Title grants, Special Education reimbursements, and careful management of per-pupil funds. We are a “school-wide” Title I school, which means that we provide specialized support across all student populations. Our existing SRBI framework, which will also be applied to 4th/5th grades, is specifically geared to identifying students who may be at-risk and provides support to all teachers, so no student is overlooked. In addition, students with an IEP are supported through a robust Special Education effort which is fully reimbursed by our sending districts and therefore self-sustaining.

Section 5.6: ISAAC’s CSP budget is written to support exclusively those items related to the initial start-up for the new expanded grades. The requested CSP funds are not embedded in normal operating costs and will not supplant any existing funding streams. ISAAC has demonstrated a strong interest from families within the community. With a waiting list of over 200 applicants, we anticipate that this number will continue to grow as the school communicates its successes and unique offerings. While we remain confident with the rationale of our belief regarding the low risk associated with projected enrollment for grades 4 and 5, we still intend to utilize strong marketing strategies to promote the 4th grade lottery for ISAAC for the 2024-2025 school year. The use of a marketing campaign that includes professional videos, commercials, mailings, and targeted social media ads will promote the new entry grade into ISAAC that begins the 5-year journey at ISAAC. With a unique model design for learning, targeted advertising will generate an interest that has not been marketed before. As a Connecticut charter school, ISAAC has the unique financial opportunity to receive 100% funding for the costs associated with educating special education students. This means that ISAAC will not have to adjust its budget like other school districts who may receive an unexpected “heavy hitter” - a special education family with expensive needs. Moreover, ISAAC receives Education Cost Sharing

funds that adjust based on special populations along with Title I, II, III, and IV funds that are often adjusted based on student population data. These funds help provide the necessary funds to support all students who enter ISAAC. Furthermore, ISAAC's afterschool programming funding comes from the 21st Century Community Learning Center federal grant that provides opportunities for students to engage in afterschool programs and athletics.

SECTION 6: GRANT PROJECT GOALS

Section 6.1.a: Our academic SMART goal of outperforming our host district, New London, on state-wide assessments in both ELA and mathematics directly addresses how we at ISAAC will continue to strive to achieve Connecticut's targets for the School Performance Index. Our academic SMART goal will be measured by our 4th grade (in 2025) and 5th grade (in 2026) scores on the SBAC. Our curriculum, which is directly supported through this grant with the purchasing of materials, includes targeted reading, spelling, writing, and mathematics materials and programs.

Section 6.1.b: Our academic SMART goal, which is outlined in the previous section, directly impacts our students that are educationally diverse and disadvantaged. As stated throughout our narrative, the driving force behind our expansion project at ISAAC is to offer an outstanding education that will better serve our student demographics that tend to be educationally disadvantaged. Our academic SMART goal of outperforming our host district, New London, in state-wide assessments will help ensure that we are delivering a rigorous curriculum that not only meets our students' needs but challenges them. Our remaining SMART goals focus on our operations, student collaboration, and admissions into ISAAC. Our operations SMART goal states that ISAAC will maintain a balanced school budget that is fiscally responsive to the needs of ISAAC. This will be measured through our end-of-year budget, and we feel confident that it will be easy to maintain as it is already supported within our established system. Our admissions SMART goal, that ISAAC will increase their applications of out of district students in 4th and 5th grade, directly supports our efforts to increase our reach to rural students and the purchasing of not only our vans but increased marketing. To make this goal achievable, not only are we increasing our marketing efforts, but we will purchase two vans to offer travel "hubs" to families outside of our host district. This goal will be directly measured by the number of applications to ISAAC in the 2025-2026 school year. Finally, our collaboration SMART goal, which states that students in 4th and 5th grades will make improvement in collaboration skills by the end of the academic year, not only will better prepare our disadvantaged students for their futures but will increase their critical thinking skills, accountability and responsibility. Additionally, this SMART goal directly ties into the flexible

seating model that we are using in our expansion project and that is supported through this grant. ISAAC already uses a collaboration rubric that ties to accountable academic “talk” and this rubric will be the means for which we measure success of our collaboration goal.

Section 6.2: The four SMART goals that we have set clearly align and support the overall mission and goals at ISAAC. In our 2029 strategic plan (see Appendix 3) our goals include “creating a safe and positive environment” which includes meeting students’ academic and social-emotional needs toward becoming active and responsible citizens much like our collaboration and academic SMART goals. Additionally, our school goals include having “systems of excellence” including creating a collective responsibility through the intelligent allocation of our financial and human resources thus connecting to our operations SMART goal. Finally, our school wide goal around being a “top choice” school that further outlines increasing the communication of the strengths of ISAAC to promote ISAAC as one of the premier middle schools to attend in Southeastern Connecticut fully connects to our admissions SMART goal. Not only do our SMART goals, but more importantly our goals outlined within our strategic plan, ensure high levels of student achievement and school success. Furthermore, as stated in the previous section, each SMART goal is tied to a means of measuring its success. While each goal may not be able to be measured by a standard assessment such as our academic goal which will be measured through SBAC performance and our scores on the School Performance Index, each goal is tied to a means of measure such as rubrics, increased applications, and an end-of-year budget report.

SECTION 7: PRIORITY POINTS

Section 7.1.a: ISAAC is the final stages of establishing a partnership with Salem Public Schools to share curricular knowledge, expertise, and instructional strategies in science for grades 4 through 8. To paraphrase former President Barrack Obama, US schools need to see what the top schools in the country are doing, adopt these strategies and methods that work with those successful students, and apply those same strategies to support their students in their school district. It is with this vision that ISAAC and Salem plan on organizing a formal process that allows for ISAAC to work with the teachers and administrators of Salem Public Schools on science curriculum and instruction that has allowed them to place top 5 among all schools in Connecticut for Next Generation Sciences Standards test scores.

Section 7.1.b: This summer, the ISAAC Executive Director and the Salem Public School PK-8 Principal have developed a plan to collaborate with the goal of implementing a strong, vertical science curriculum at ISAAC that will allow for increased test scores on the NGSS Test that is given to all grade 5 and grade 8 students in

Connecticut. As ISAAC begins its new journey with grades 4 and 5 in the upcoming school years, this partnership will allow for ISAAC curriculum leaders and teachers to formally meet and collaborate with science teachers and administrators from a successful school district nearby who “talk the talk and walk the walk”. Teachers and administrators from both schools will meet virtually via a co-hosted ZOOM webinar at the beginning of each quarter (September, November, February, and April) to discuss best practices for science curriculum development and high-quality instruction which lead to student success. Teachers and administrators will engage in informal conversations throughout the year as questions and needs arise. With the implementation of a strong science foundation within the 4th grade science curriculum in the 2024-2025 school year, students will be set up for success in the 5th grade state science exam that is administered in the spring of 2025. This multi-year partnership will support the goal of advancing our ISAAC students and teachers toward success. Early success will be determined by student success in comparison to the partner district on NGSS interim assessments called IABs.

Section 7.1.c: Salem Public Schools has agreed to sign an MOU agreement with ISAAC for the aforementioned partnership that is detailed in SECTION 7.2.A.

Section 7.2.a: Connecticut Charter Schools may only be in towns or cities that are low-performing and socio-economically have high rates of special populations that include a high percentage of students on free and reduced lunch. These districts are called Alliance Districts in Connecticut which also have high rates of poverty and students needing special education and/or English language learner support. ISAAC is located in New London, CT which has historically high percentages of the aforementioned populations. Moreover, ISAAC is committed through its acceptance policy to always have a minimum of 50% student population from New London. For the new 4th grade class, ISAAC has accepted 90.6% of students from New London. It is guaranteed that ISAAC will always serve students with a history of low academic performance, free or reduced lunch, and/or students needing support.

Section 7.2.b: The ISAAC Board of Directors approved the request to expand the school’s range of grade levels to include grades 4 and 5 to its current grades 6 to 8 format at its September 2023 meeting. The proposal comes from the continued academic achievement gap issues that present itself regarding the grade level readiness of the students who attend ISAAC. The recent data coming from the OLSTAT School Readiness Testing showed that 35% of the students entering ISAAC are in the lower 10% of students in their grade level nationwide and 75% are at least two grade levels below their peers nationwide. Moreover, according to AimsWeb data, only 7% of incoming students achieved goal or above in mathematics and 15%

in ELA respectively as compared to their peers nationwide. Receiving a group of incoming students earlier to provide the necessary interventions will improve these students' data results immensely. Furthermore, as one of the few if not only charter schools in Connecticut being grades 6 through 8, the addition of grades 4 and 5 will create a traditional middle school model of grades 4 through 8 that will provide the community with an option to attend a middle school following grade 3. Every year, ISAAC uses AimsWeb data to assess student academic success in the fall, winter, and spring. This formative assessment approach allows the school to see the student's gains in academic performance in mathematics, reading, and writing as compared to students nationwide. A review of these results is acted on by the school's SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Intervention) Team and grade-level PLC teams track and incorporate interventions within the planning and instruction of lessons.

Section 7.4.a: This school year, ISAAC received an incredible increase in out-of-district applications from outside of New London. In a quest to increase the number of out-of-district students at ISAAC, we have received numerous phone calls from out-of-district families, especially those residing in Towns such as Preston and Old Lyme, asking for transportation. Moreover, it has been a trend that families who have inquired about sending their children to ISAAC state that transportation is the sole reason for not attending ISAAC. For these reasons, ISAAC seeks to incorporate a transportation system that would attract and provide a solution to students in rural geographic areas. The ideology of this transportation system was developed in 2013 by the current Executive Director at his previous choice school district. To attract and accept rural students to his high school, Dr. Spera created two transportation hubs in rural communities. This transportation system resulted in more than a 600% increase in applications from these targeted rural communities at his previous choice school district. Using the exact approach, ISAAC would purchase two 15-passenger vans that would allow parents to drive a few miles to a designated hub such as a supermarket parking lot for drop off and pick up of their children. Two designated rural towns (Old Lyme and Preston) would become the locations for AM pickup and PM drop off. This is what ISAAC is currently missing and would be the game changer for the addition of grades 4 and 5 rural students. Families choosing ISAAC will need to understand that due to the constraints attached to the funding of this wonderful opportunity, only 4th and 5th grade students will be allowed to utilize this optional transportation system.