Project Narrative (Early-Phase)

Contents

Introduction, Absolute Priorities, and Competitive Preference Priorities

American Institutes for Research® (AIR®), the Community Foundation of Greater Flint (CFGF), and the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD) are pleased to submit our proposed Education Innovation and Research (EIR) early-phase project, **Ready, Set, Succeed: Kindergarten Transitions in Flint (RSS).** This project addresses two Absolute Priorities and two Competitive Preference Priorities: Absolute Priority 1: Demonstrates a rationale; and Absolute Priority 4: Field-initiated innovations—fostering knowledge and promoting the development of skills that prepare students to be informed, thoughtful, and productive individuals and citizens; Competitive Preference Priority 2: Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on underserved students and educators; and Competitive Preference Priority 3: Promoting equity in student access to educational resources and opportunities.

The project will take place in Flint, MI—a small city with a majority Black (54%) population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2019), where families face the dual challenge of recovering from the Flint water crisis while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the design phase, we will partner with three innovation sites in Flint to develop RSS: Educare Flint preschool, Cummings Great Expectations preschool, and Durant Tuuri-Mott elementary school. The project will also test the impact of RSS in seven additional preschools, with 56 teaching teams/ classrooms, and 396 students in 370 families across the city of Flint.

This early phase EIR project will develop, test, and disseminate a new approach to the kindergarten transition: Ready, Set, Succeed (referred to as RSS in this proposal). RSS will address pressing challenges about how to authentically engage and support Black families and high-need students (i.e., students from low-income backgrounds, racially minoritized learners who receive unequal access to high quality learning environments) during their transition from

preschool to kindergarten. For the past 3 years, AIR has led a Research-Program Partnership (RPP) in Flint focused on improving access to high-quality early childhood care and education. Our RPP members include a broad coalition of program and school district leadership, family engagement advocates and instructional coaches, families, funders, community foundation members, K–12 school district staff, and early childhood researchers (see Appendix J.1 for a full list). The Flint RPP, facilitated by AIR, began in July 2020, while the community was deep in the COVID-19 pandemic. In fall 2020, the RPP engaged in a research-question-generating workshop and identified the need for better kindergarten transitions in Flint as a pressing challenge. This EIR proposal responds directly to the questions posed by the Flint community.

To develop RSS, we will use the ecological systems theory of family engagement, which acknowledges that school readiness does not lie solely in the child but, rather, requires ready families, ready schools, and ready communities. RSS's core components include direct supports for families to help them advocate for their children, a mix of job-embedded training for both preschool and K–12 educators and school leaders, and opportunities for authentic community engagement and collaboration. The core components are (1) Teacher and school leader job-embedded professional development (PD)/coaching (with a focus on understanding systemic racism, self-reflection on racial bias, and culturally competent instruction), (2) Building Bridges meetings (prekindergarten [PK]–kindergarten joint planning meetings), (3) staff and family data dialogues, (4) parent–provider cafes (5) buddy visits (which enable children and families to spend more time in the K–12 settings in the year before kindergarten), and (6) direct family engagement and advocacy activities. RSS will be designed to provide the skills necessary for Black families to successfully advocate for their children in educational settings, improve the

cultural competence of instruction in Flint, and foster greater collaboration across the PK–12 system—all of which will improve children's school readiness and positive racial identity.

A. Significance

A.1 The Ready Set Succeed Project Will Develop, Refine, Test, and Disseminate a New Approach to the Kindergarten Transition in Flint, MI

The city of Flint is home to a resilient community, but they face significant economic and public health challenges. A sobering statistic is that a baby born in Flint is likely to live almost 5 years fewer than a baby born in another American city (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2020). Over the past several decades, divestment of the auto industry and White migration to Flint's suburbs have contributed to an economic downturn. Today, more than one-third of residents' incomes in Flint are below the federal poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a), considerably higher than the U.S. poverty rate of 10.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). In 2014, Flint gained national attention due to lead contamination of the city's water supply. This led to disastrous effects on the cognitive development and well-being of its youngest residents. One need became vitally clear: Flint needed high-quality early childhood education (ECE) for its families to combat the devastating effects of early lead exposure. The Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations preschool innovation sites were established in 2017 in response to the water crisis.

A next step in the community's response to the water crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic is to create a seamless transition from existing high-quality preschools to kindergarten. We know that the kindergarten transition is a pivotal time for young children and their families—one that is defined by change, uncertainty, and worry, which can leave them vulnerable to future school challenges (Purtell, et al., 2020;Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). As children enter kindergarten, the

academic and behavioral expectations change, and nearly half of students experience challenges in meeting those expectations (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). While the academic and behavioral demands in kindergarten have increased in the last decade, kindergarten transition practices have not shifted to meet those changing expectations (Bassok et al., 2016; Little et al., 2016). RSS will help educators and school leaders in Flint make this needed shift.

Current kindergarten transition practices in Flint are nominal at best. In 2017, the community launched a kindergarten transition working group made up of elementary and preschool school directors/principals, family engagement staff, and parents. The group drafted an ambitious plan, laying out many best practices that schools could implement to support families as their children transitioned to kindergarten. However, the plan is voluntary, and none of the recommended practices are systematically in place in the district. The plan also does not directly address the needs of this Black-majority school district with a cultural competence lens, and the district does not provide educators with training about their own biases, which influence the classroom experiences of Black children. Although there is a will in Flint to support the kindergarten transition plan, there is no financial support to make the plan a reality, nor is there funding to create or provide much-needed cultural competence training. As such, families are left on their own to navigate this critical life transition. RSS will fill this gap.

The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated family challenges and forced preschools to shift programming to meet family needs in new and innovative ways. Flint was still recovering from the water crisis when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. As COVID-19 ravaged the country, existing health disparities in Flint were exacerbated, as the virus disproportionately affected Black communities (van Dorn et al., 2020). For example, 59% of Educare Flint and Cummings families were essential workers and were required to work outside the home during the

pandemic, placing them at risk of contracting the virus; 20% of these families actually contracted the virus; and 39% of these families said that their emotional well-being was worse during COVID. The Flint community's experience responding to the water crisis positioned the community to quickly meet families' needs during the pandemic. Educare Flint and Cummings nimbly adapted to family needs by delivering food, water, hygiene products, and a mix of in-person and virtual instructional activities to meet families where they were. As Flint enters a third consecutive school year impacted by COVID-19, these preschools have become a source of essential support for families. However, many families are worried about leaving the comfort and support of preschool to navigate the K–12 system in Flint. Not surprisingly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, kindergarten enrollment is down nationwide (Dee et al., 2021). In Flint, kindergarten enrollment is down 56% from before the pandemic (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2019-2021). Making the leap to kindergarten during the pandemic is an especially stressful transition for families. RSS will provide much needed support to families in Flint, with sensitivity to the ways in which racial challenges are exacerbated by the pandemic.

Finally, one cannot discuss the educational experiences of families in Flint without addressing racial equity. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, which was captured on camera for the entire world to see, our country faced a reckoning on race and racism. Our RPP began during this same "summer of reckoning" and has focused from Day 1 on race and racism in Flint. Deep issues of systemic racism and bias are embedded in the context of the transition to K–12 schooling. Flint Community Schools (FCS) serve a majority Black student population (86%), and educators in the district are majority White (73%) (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2020-2021a; 2020-2021b). Research tells us that educators are not

always prepared, and classrooms are not always designed to provide equitable and nonbiased education (Carter et al., 2017; Neumann, 2010). For example, teachers have lower expectations of Black children and underestimate their academic abilities compared with White peers (Gilliam et al., 2016; Humphries et al., 2012; Ready & Wright, 2011). This manifests in lower student success in what is often referred to as the achievement gap but is better described as an opportunity or access gap (Arnett, 2019; Boykin & Noguera, 2011). In Flint, only 9% of Black students in Grade 3 are proficient in reading compared with 18% of White counterparts (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2018-2019) (also see Appendix J.2). The pattern is similar for Grade 3 math achievement in Flint, where 8% of Black students are proficient compared with 20% of White students (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2018-2019).

Even in the face of systematic oppression and disparities, Black families and children can and do thrive. Research indicates that positive racial identity predicts better behavioral competence (Marcelo & Yates, 2018; Wissink et al., 2008), self-esteem (Xu et al., 2015), psychological well-being (Syed et al., 2013; Mandara et al., 2009), and academic achievement (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016) and decreased drug use and violence (Gray & Montgomery, 2012; Irwin et al., 2017). In addition, culturally competent instruction holds promise for reducing existing disparities (Curenton et al., 2020; Gay, 2018; Humphries & Iruka, 2017) and fosters self-acceptance, self-esteem, and academic success for Black students (Shockley & Cleveland, 2011). We also know that early childhood classrooms are an ideal setting to intervene and support positive racial attitudes and identities because (1) children form their racial identity in early childhood, (2) these identities carry into social contexts of adulthood, and (3) early

childhood classrooms shape racial attitudes and positive racial identities for all students (Grierson, 2021; Michael & Bartoli, 2014; Nash et al., 2017; Silva & Langhout, 2011).

In addition to supporting educators, RSS will also provide better support to Black families in advocating for their children as they navigate the complex K–12 school system. Parents are a child's first teacher, and through partnerships with schools, they build skills for parental advocacy (Wilder, 2014). Parental advocacy supports children's future educational success (particularly for children from marginalized communities) and can act as a protective factor against the harmful effects of oppression, racism, and systemic inequalities (Harven, 2014; Hope & Spencer, 2017; McGee & Spencer, 2015). The advocacy skills developed as part of RSS will benefit families long after their child graduates from kindergarten.

Finally, communities must also be ready to support children and families as they transition into kindergarten. To create more ready communities, the RSS intervention provides specific time for stakeholders across the community to collaborate. RSS will intentionally and consistently engage families, preschools, K-12 schools, foundation partners, and community partners. We anticipate that these opportunities for collaboration will foster common goals across the system and create more collaboration in the early childhood community.

A.2. Dissemination Strategies for Ready, Set, Succeed

Existing relationships between the proposed partners will provide a seamless local dissemination approach. For example, CFGF and AIR staff already meet weekly. AIR also convenes biweekly full-team meetings with stakeholders from Flint preschools, GISD, CFGF, and HighScope. AIR also facilitates monthly RPP meetings that include a large and diverse set of stakeholders from the Flint early childhood community. These established meetings will enable important feedback during RSS design and evaluation phases.

Findings and implications from this study of RSS will be disseminated nationally through the Educare Learning Network. The two innovation preschools (Educare Flint and Cummings Great Expectations) are part of a 20-site national network of preschools all implementing the Educare model. All 20 sites and their local evaluation partners meet monthly to discuss challenges and share findings from implementation and outcome data. In addition, the Educare Network hosts annual "Data Camp" meetings at which we can present findings from the current grant to the entire network of stakeholders. These presentations will be especially relevant to other Black-majority Educare sites and their local evaluators across the country, to adopt RSS.

B. Quality of the Project Design

B.1. Conceptual Framework

To develop RSS, we will rely on an **ecological systems theory of family engagement** (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)**.** Urie Bronfenbrenner (cofounder of the Head Start program) made explicit that children do not exist and develop in a vacuum. Instead, their development is informed by the multiple contexts in which they live and play each day. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that different environments make up the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems that surround a child in concentric circles, see Appendix J.3. RSS will intervene at multiple levels of the early childhood ecosystem in Flint to improve the transition to kindergarten (see Appendix G). At the microsystem, RSS includes a mix of job-embedded PD for educators and school leaders, as well as direct engagement activities for families. At the mesosystem, RSS will create opportunities for meaningful collaboration between families, PK educators and leaders, and K-12 school educators and leaders. In the exosystem, the broader Flint early childhood community will be engaged in RSS design and implementation through our partnerships with the FECC, CFGF, the Child Care Network, the GISD (see letters of support in

Appendix C) Finally, the macrosystem includes current race relations and historical racial trauma in the Flint community. The hope is that RSS' implementation will, in time, create systemic change at the community level. However, this is out of scope for the early-phase project.

Following the ecological systems theory of family engagement, the RSS logic model (see Appendix G) posits that implementing the core components of RSS in Flint will (1) improve culturally competent instruction in preschool and kindergarten classrooms, (2) increase parents' advocacy for their child's education and self-efficacy in managing the transition to kindergarten, and (3) increase collaboration across the PK–12 system in Flint. We expect these improvements to improve kindergarten readiness and positive racial identity for children. CFGF will develop the core components of RSS (Exhibit 1).To achieve the outcomes described in the logic model.

Exhibit 1. Core Components of Ready, Set, Succeed

Core component	Detailed description	Developer	Facilitator
1a. Teacher and school leader job-embedded PD: Groundwater training	Provide training for educators, school leaders, and district staff to understand structural racism. The Groundwater training helps practitioners internalize the reality that we live in a racially structured society and that that is what causes racial inequity. https://www.racialequityinstitute.com/groundwaterapproach	Racial Equity Institute	Racial Equity Institute
1b. Teacher and school leader job-embedded PD: Reflections on bias/implicit attitudes	Educators, school leaders, and families will all take the Implicit Association Test (IAT), which measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report. The IAT may demonstrate an implicit attitude or bias by measuring latency to respond in an online test. Personal results will be used to spark reflection and foster conversations in parent–provider café sessions. https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html	Project Implicit	CFGF (Task Lead for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation)
2. Building Bridges meetings (PK–K joint planning meetings)	Quarterly Building Bridges Meetings (with monthly meetings May through October) will convene staff across the preschool and kindergarten innovation sites. These meetings will provide dedicated joint planning time to prepare for kindergarten transitions.	CFGF	CFGF/ Community Facilitator to be hired
3. Staff and family data dialogues	Quarterly meetings will provide insights from implementation and outcome data collected at innovation sites (Educare Flint, Cummings Great Expectations, Durant-Tuuri-Mott, and Flint district data). Data Dialogues will include school staff across preschool and kindergarten settings for discussions of data.	AIR	AIR
4. Parent–provider cafés	Parent–provider cafés will provide an opportunity to convene families and school staff from both preschool and kindergarten settings to build a shared understanding of child development and expectations for behavior in preschool and kindergarten. Cafés will rotate every other month for each role-alike group	CFGF	CFGF/ Community Facilitator to be hired

	(families, preschool staff, kindergarten staff) and mixed-role groups, and will offer space to discuss role-specific needs and challenges.		
5. Buddy visits	Monthly visits will be held throughout the school year during which students and families from preschool classrooms will visit and engage with school staff and kindergarten students in elementary school classrooms (and vice versa). Visits will increase to two visits per month in April and May and to weekly visits in June. This time spent inside the building will help children become accustomed to both the preschool and kindergarten sites. Each preschool student will have a kindergarten buddy, and the pair will be assigned common goals during the Buddy Visits. Families will also be paired with buddy families to help answer questions about the kindergarten transition.	CFGF	CFGF/ Community Facilitator to be hired/School Staff/Families/ Students
6. Direct family engagement and advocacy activities	These activities will be developed to strengthen families' educational advocacy skills and will be engaging and interactive. All families are invited to participate in the series of events. Childcare and dinner will be provided.	CFGF	CFGF/ Community Facilitator to be hired/School Staff/Families/ Students

B.2. Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Measures of the Ready, Set, Succeed Project

The overarching goal of RSS is to improve kindergarten transition in Flint. To achieve this goal, there are four objectives: (1) design the RSS intervention; (2) pilot the RSS intervention; (3) test RSS for impact; and (4) analyze, report, and disseminate findings about RSS. Each Objective has clear outcomes and is measurable (see Exhibit 2 and Section D for more information).

Exhibit 2. Strategies, Outcomes, and Measures for Key Project Objectives

Strategies	Outcomes	Measures
Objective 1: Design the RSS (RSS) Intervention (Phase 1: Year 1 and 2)		
Strategy 1.1. Create a manualized set of trainings and materials for RSS	Outcome 1.1. A document provides information about RSS trainings for educators, and CFGF creates the RSS manual for educators.	Measure 1.1. At least 95% of RPP members and 100% of expert panel members "agree" or "strongly agree" that the final materials addresses stakeholder needs. Measure 1.2. At least 95% of families with 4-year-old children at innovation sites agree that the family engagement strategies are feasible and would support their needs.
Strategy 1.2. Refine RSS.	Outcome 1.2. The RSS intervention is regularly revised, based on RPP and expert panel feedback and qualitative focus group/interview data.	Measure 1.4. An annual memo summarizes revisions to RSS based on feedback from RPP members, expert panel members, and family members.

Strategies	Outcomes	Measures
Objective 2: Pilot the RSS Intervention (Phase 2: 2023-24 SY and 2024-25)		
Strategy 2.1. Pilot RSS at innovation sites (two preschools and one elementary school)	Outcome 2.1. Successful treatment of all educators and school leaders at the three innovation sites (Educare Flint preschool, Cummings Great Expectations preschool, and Durant Tuuri-Mott Elementary School)	Measure 2.1 Fidelity rubric was applied to all fidelity data during the pilot phase. All fidelity metrics are met at the three pilot sites.
Strategy 2.2. Refine RSS	Outcome 2.2. The RSS intervention is regularly revised, based on pilot data from Educare Flint preschool, Cummings Great Expectations preschool, and Durant Tuuri-Mott Elementary School.	Measure 2.2. Three interim reports summarize revisions to RSS based on feedback from RPP and expert panel members and pilot data.
Objective 3: Test RSS for Impact (Phase 2: SY 2024-25 and SY 2025–26)		
Strategy 3.1. Identify an additional seven preschools and seven elementary schools in Flint to participate in an impact study	Outcome 3.1. School leaders and educators agree to participate in the project for 2 years.	Measure 3.1. School leader and educator signatures (from seven preschools and seven elementary schools) are collected on the project memorandum of understanding.
Strategy 3.2. Randomly assign teachers at preschool sites to treatment and control conditions (55 educators in seven preschools).	Outcome 3.2. Samples of treatment and control schools have baseline equivalence in key student, teacher, and school characteristics.	Measure 3.2. The number of schools in each group is documented in a random assignment memorandum.
Strategy 3.3. Implement the RSS intervention in all treatment preschools (school year 2023–24) and in all preschools and elementary schools (school year 2024–25).	Outcome 3.3. RSS is implemented with a high degree of fidelity and quality in 55 classrooms in seven preschools and in seven elementary schools.	Measure 3.3. All fidelity indicators in the fidelity matrix meet adequate thresholds of fidelity for each implementation year.
Strategy 3.4. Collect, analyze, and regularly share and discuss implementation feedback with RPP members.	Outcome 3.4. Implementation data are summarized and shared during monthly RPP meetings.	Measure 3.4. 100% of RPP meeting agendas include implementation updates. 100% of RPP meeting notes summarize feedback from members.
Strategy 3.5. Track family, educator, and school leader dosage.	Outcome 3.5. At least 80% of participants receive the full dosage of training and supports.	Measure 3.5. Attendance records indicate that at least 80% of all participants complete the program. .
Strategy 3.6. Assess the impact of RSS on educator and student outcomes.	Outcome 3.6. Data on outcomes are collected and analyzed as planned.	Measure 3.6 An impact memo is produced, and impact findings meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards with or without reservations.
Strategy 3.7. Further refine RSS.	Outcome 3.7. All core components are regularly refined.	Measure 3.7. An annual memorandum summarizes revisions to RSS based on participant feedback.
Objective 4: Analyze, Report, and Disseminate Findings About RSS (Phase 3: 2024 and beyond)		
Strategy 4.1. Publish information about the RSS intervention and lessons learned.	Outcome 4.1. Educators and interested stakeholders are aware of RSS.	Measure 4.1. Publications include at least two infographics per year and two conference presentations after RSS refinements.

Strategies	Outcomes	Measures
Strategy 4.2. Share RSS broadly	Outcome 4.2. Stakeholders interested in improving transition to kindergarten learn about RSS.	Measure 4.2. Representatives from Michigan Department of Education and additional states or districts attend an annual virtual event to learn about RSS.

B.3. Meeting the Needs of Families and Educators in Flint

As described in Section A.4, RSS will directly address the dire needs—namely equitable access to high-quality ECE and effective, intensive family engagement—expressed by family members in the Flint RPP. In fall 2020, the RPP engaged in an intensive research-question-generating workshop facilitated by AIR. This 2-day virtual workshop resulted a list of six priority topic areas and 17 research questions that the RPP would like to address over the next 5 years. RSS will address 12 of the research questions posed by RPP members in the workshop (see Appendix J.4). In addition, to ensure that family perspective is never lost through the design and evaluation phases of our work, we intentionally invited family members to serve on our RSS expert panel to supplement input from the RPP (see Section C and Appendices C and G for a description of the RSS expert panel to be newly convened for this project). Finally, the project includes ongoing RPP monthly meetings, at which we will continually check in with Flint families and educators to ensure that RSS directly meets their needs. This well-established partnership between AIR, CFGF, GISD, HighScope, and our three innovations schools is the ideal setting to ensure that we are meeting the needs of families and educators in Flint.

C. Adequacy of Resources and Quality of the Management Plan

To meet each of the four project objectives, we propose the following management plan. AIR will serve as prime, and CFGF will serve as a key partner in carrying out the proposed project. After providing three years of independent evaluation to the innovation sites and GISD, the district, staff, and families alike consider AIR a trusted research partner. AIR will also provide the overall project management necessary for a project of this scope. CFGF will lead the

Design Team and will be responsible for facilitating the design, optimization, and implementation of the intervention, and leading engagement with local school partners. GISD will also provide support for RSS implementation throughout the project. AIR will lead the Evaluation Team. We will partner with HighScope, who will be primarily responsible for data collection. AIR and HighScope have no financial interest in the outcome of the evaluation, and CFGF will own the intervention materials. Lastly, we will convene an Expert Advisory Panel with both local RPP members and national experts to provide guidance on design, implementation, and evaluation. Our expert panel specifically invites Flint families as experts, who, together with national experts in ECE and racial equity, will provide a unique and comprehensive lens to strengthen this work (See Appendix J.5 for the full management structure and key roles, and Appendix C for letters of support from panel members).

The project has four phases that align with the four objectives. Phase 1 (Years 1 and 2) will include design and refinement of RSS. This will involve rapid brainstorming and feedback from a series of focus groups, interviews, and extant data, as well as substantial input from the expert panel and RPP members on intervention materials and activities. In Phase 2 (Years 2 and 3). we will pilot the newly developed RSS with the two preschool innovation sites and one elementary school in school years 2023–24 and 2024–25. We will gather all implementation and outcome data during the pilot to inform continuous improvement and refinement of RSS. In Phase 3 (Years 3–5), we will focus on implementation and evaluation across the city of Flint. We will launch a teacher-level, randomized controlled trial in seven preschools in Flint, that will follow nearly 400 students from the beginning of their fourth year of preschool (school year 2024–25) to the end of kindergarten (school year 2025–26). AIR will document implementation and outcomes for all school leaders, educators, families, and children participating in RSS. Phase

4 (Years 4 and 5) will focus analyzing, reporting, and disseminating findings about RSS (see Appendix J.6 for a more detailed timeline).

C.1. Key Qualifications of Ready, Set, Succeed Staff

Each partner brings key personnel with strong qualifications and records of success in their assigned roles (see Appendix B for résumés). AIR is uniquely qualified to lead the overall project, given our existing role in leading the Flint RPP, as well as our strong project management skills, organizational structure, and deep knowledge of rigorous evaluation and community impact. [redacted]***, Principal Investigator****,* has over 15 years of experience conducting applied research and evaluation in ECE contexts and will lead the project. [redacted] and [redacted]***, Senior Advisors,*** will guide and provide input throughout the course of the project and support [redacted]. [redacted]***, PhD,*** will serve as the ***Evaluation Team Lead*****,** given her experience serving as the project director for the existing AIR-CFGF partnership and deep knowledge of ECE research and job-embedded PD in the Educare Model. [redacted]***, PhD, Lead Quantitative Analyst,*** will use her strong quantitative skills in ECE and knowledge of Flint to lead analyses; and [redacted]***, PhD, Lead Qualitative Analyst,*** will lead analyses of implementation and qualitative data. [redacted] is also a native Michigander. [redacted]***, Equity and Technical Assistance Expert,*** will ensure that the evaluation and implementation are infused with a racial equity lens and apply her strong facilitation skills to communicate findings across the project. AIR will also subcontract with HighScope, a Michigan-based research firm, to collect all primary data. HighScope is currently involved in data collection for the existing Flint RPP.

CFGF, our primary partner for this work, CFGF will lead the Design Team. [redacted]***, Co-Principal Investigator and Design Team Lead,*** is (a) the executive director of the

Flint Early Childhood Collaborative (FECC) and Educare Flint and (b) an engaging scholar and leader with the passion necessary to move this effort forward. [redacted]***, Project Manager,*** is an executive assistant for FECC and Educare Flint and will support [redacted]. [redacted] will use her role as a trusted advisor in the community to engage partners for RSS. [redacted] will serve as ***Task Lead for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation,*** and [redacted] will serve as ***Task Lead for ECE and Family Engagement,*** given their existing work in these local efforts in Flint. Finally, [redacted]**,** president and CEO of CFGF, and [redacted]**,** vice president of community impact at CFGF, will serve as ***Senior Advisors*** to the Design Team. They will oversee and provide guidance to CFGF's contributors, leveraging their strong community relationships and extensive experience in the foundation and nonprofit sectors. Of note, CFGF will contributed all of their efforts as an in-kind contribution, see Appendix H.

GISD is our key district partner for the RSS project. GISD is committed to releasing educators and school leaders to participate in RSS trainings, Building Bridges meetings, and data dialogues. GISD will also collaborate with CFGF to identify additional sites for the impact evaluation. If RSS demonstrates promise, GISD is committed to integrating it into the kindergarten transition framework across the school district after the grant period.

C.2. Reasonability of Costs for Ready, Set, Succeed

The cost of the proposed project is reasonable relative to its significant contribution to the field. During the course of the 5-year project, at least 696 families and 715 students will participate in the RSS intervention. The per-family cost for the 2-year intervention is roughly [redacted] and the per-student cost is [redacted]. These costs are less than other intensive community-based interventions (e.g., Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academies costs [redacted] for 1 year [Jobson, n.d.] and the Perry Project costs [redacted] for 2 years [Barnett, 1985]). The per-family cost

also includes the cost of ongoing job-embedded PD for more than 400 educators and 120 school leaders. The per-educator cost for training and implementation support in Years 3 and 4 is [redacted]. The educators and school leaders who work with these students and families will likely serve them better, because of their participation in RSS.

C.3. Ensuring Feedback and Continuous Improvement

CFGF and AIR will leverage the existing RPP and relationships with the Flint ECE community to ensure ongoing feedback and continuous improvement. To inform the Design Team, AIR will share formative and summative evaluation data on RSS implementation and outcomes (see Section D.3 for more details). AIR will also analyze and summarize formative data on performance monitoring and management routines (see Section B.2 for a list of the types of data). These data will be shared and co-interpreted during our monthly RPP meetings and quarterly data dialogues with school staff and leaders, and families, respectively. The RPP is already familiar with cycles of data collection, feedback, and dialogues for program improvement, as are staff at GISD and schools, from participating in AIR-facilitated data dialogues in the past. Through these ongoing cycles of feedback and improvement, we will ensure that data are relevant, actionable, and informed by community stakeholders

D. Quality of the Project Evaluation

AIR will conduct a mixed-methods experimental evaluation of RSS. The evaluation will incorporate rich and formative feedback about program implementation and continuous improvement during the pilot and impact evaluations. The evaluation will answer four research questions (RQs) about the impact of RSS and two RQ about implementation (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3. Objectives, Research Questions, and Measures for Ready, Set, Succeed

Objectives	Research questions	Measure
Objective 1: Design the RSS Intervention (Year 1 and 2) **Objective 2:** Pilot the RSS Intervention (school years 2023–24 and 2024–25)	**RQ 5:** To what degree is RSS implemented with fidelity? RQ 6: What are the barriers and facilitators of RSS' implementation?	Implementation data from the pilot in three innovation sites (Educare Flint, Cummings Great Expectations, and Durant-Tuuri-Mott), & full impact study treatment sites including: attendance at racial-equity trainings, completion rate of IAT, participation in staff data dialogues, attendance at and participation in parent–provider café sessions, attendance at Building Bridges meetings, participation in Buddy Visits, and satisfaction surveys to gather feedback about all RSS materials and trainings and coach logs. AIR will also collect qualitative data bout the barriers and facilitators of RSS implementation through focus groups, in March/April of each school year for the pilot and impact studies.
Objective 3: Test RSS for Impact (school years 2024–25 and 2025–26)	**RQ 1:** What is the impact of RSS on student outcomes (kindergarten readiness—including language, mathematics, executive functioning, and social emotional competence—and positive racial identity)?	• Michigan Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) • Teaching Strategies GOLD • Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) (LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2012) • Minnesota Executive Functioning Scale (MEFS) (Carlson & Zelazo, 2014) • Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, 4th Edition (PPVT-4) (Dunn & Dunn, 2007) • Preschool Language Scale, 5th Edition (PLS-5) (Zimmerman et al., 2011) • Variation of Clark & Clark's Doll Task (Jordan & Hernandez-Reif, 2009)
	RQ 2: What is the impact of RSS on family outcomes (knowledge of kindergarten options, satisfaction with the kindergarten transition, and educational advocacy)?	• Parent Assessment of Knowledge and Advocacy Scale (PAKAS) (Lian & Fontanez-Phelan, 2001)–adapted for this study • Parent Self-efficacy in Managing the Transition to School Scale (PSMTSS) (Giallo et al., 2008)–adapted for this study
	RQ 3: What is the impact of RSS on teacher and school leaders' culturally competent instruction?	• Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale (ACSES) (Curenton et al., 2020)
	RQ 4: What is the impact of RSS on collaboration among preschool and K–12 educational settings in Flint?	• The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory, 3rd Edition (Mattessich et al., 2001)
Objective 4: Analyze, Report, and Disseminate Findings About RSS (2025 and beyond)	No specific RQ in the evaluation, but AIR and CGF will broadly disseminate findings about RSS.	• Publications include one formal final report to be made publicly available on CFGF/AIR websites and uploaded into ERIC, at least two infographics per year and two conference presentations after RSS refinements. • Project staff attend two meetings (e.g., FECC meetings, MDE directors' meetings) to disseminate project information to Flint stakeholders. • Representatives from additional districts and states as attend an annual virtual event to learn about RSS.

D.1. Evaluation Designed to Meet WWC Evidence Standards Without Reservations

To address the research questions, AIR will first conduct a pilot evaluation during the 2023–24 school year in two purposefully selected preschools and one elementary school (see Appendix J.9 for information on the innovation sites). The pilot evaluation will provide formative feedback to the development team about the relevance, coherence, and efficiency of RSS. The pilot will also identify barriers to and facilitators of implementation to inform program refinement. Next, AIR will conduct a randomized experiment, with blocked random assignment at the teacher level, that will meet WWC evidence standards without reservations. In the summer before the 2023–24 school year, AIR will randomly assign half of the educators at seven Flint preschools to receive RSS (treatment) and the remaining half of teaching teams to continue with business as usual (control). All families with rising 4-year-old students in the randomly assigned classrooms will be invited to participate in the evaluation and to consent to their children's participation. We will then follow all rising 4-year-olds in the treatment and control classrooms for 2 years and compare their outcomes at preschool entry, the end of preschool, kindergarten entry, and end of kindergarten. Treatment families will receive all RSS family supports. The control families (those in classrooms taught by control teachers) will receive business-as-usual supports for transitioning to kindergarten. This research design will yield causal estimates of programmatic impact on family, student, and teacher outcomes.

The main threat to internal validity for this design is potential selection bias resulting from sample attrition. During the 2020–21 school year, nearly half of the students in Educare Flint and Cummings enrolled in Flint public schools, and the majority (upward of 80%) enrolled in public schools in GISD. We expect this pattern to continue, but some attrition may occur if families enroll their children in a school system outside GISD in which case the study team

would not be able to track those children's readiness for kindergarten using extant data.[1] We will test baseline equivalence of the analytic sample on demographic characteristics and student outcome data obtained prior to the intervention to meet WWC standards with reservations. If attrition is high, or baseline equivalence is not achieved, we will use multiple imputation models to address missing data, which is appropriate in teacher-level random assignment studies (Puma et al., 2009).

Sample. During the pilot phase, AIR will gather fidelity and outcome data in three innovation sites: Educare Flint preschool, Cummings Great Expectations preschool, and Durant Tuuri-Mott Elementary School. We anticipate the pilot-phase sample to include three schools, 25 teaching teams, 65 educators, 20 school leaders, 300 families, and 320 students. During the impact study, we will invite seven publicly funded, high-quality preschools in Flint (as defined as a achieving a 4-star rating on the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), *Great Start to Quality*) to participate. In Flint, there are 33 publicly funded preschools (five Head Start programs, 27 state-funded Great Start Readiness Programs (GSRP), and one blended high school–GSRP program) with 4- or 5-star ratings on the QRIS that are eligible to participate in the impact study. We anticipate the impact-study sample to include 56 teaching teams/classrooms (33 RSS/33 control) and roughly 396 students (198 RSS/198 control) that are associated with 370 families (185 RSS/185 control).[2] For the staff portion of the impact-study sample, we estimate 137 educators, as most classrooms among the sample of 56 have at least two and up to three teachers. All school leaders—including early childhood specialists, family engagement advocates, preschool directors—will receive the RSS school-leader training. Kindergarten

[1] To examine whether bias has been introduced via attrition, we will compute the overall and differential attrition at the teacher and family/student levels and test for baseline equivalence in teacher and student background characteristics for the impact analysis sample.

[2] The number of students and families are not equivalent since the student sample includes siblings from the same families.

educators and school leaders at the seven partnering elementary schools will also receive the RSS training, yielding a total staff sample size of 228 staff.

The RSS intervention is multifaceted and intervenes at multiple levels of the family engagement ecosystem in Flint, which requires an in-depth data collection plan including direct child assessment and classrooms observations. These measures are costly, and our proposed sample size balances cost efficiency and adequate power to detect meaningful differences, see Appendix J.10 for details on the power analyses. With the student sample of 396 students, we can detect a minimum detectable effect size (MDES) of 0.21 even with 10% attrition from preschool to kindergarten. The student-level MDES is appropriate given that studies on PD programs have demonstrated a larger effect size on students' kindergarten readiness outcomes (weighted average ES = 0.3; Joo et al., 2019) and studies on multicultural education interventions have demonstrated a larger effect size on racial attitudes (average ES = 0.5) (Okoye-Johnson, 2011). Further, this effect size is both educationally relevant and appropriate, given prior studies of effective early childhood interventions range from -0.01 to 1.2 for cognitive outcomes and from -0.01 to 0.6 for social-emotional outcomes (Nelson et al., 2003). For the family sample of 371 families, we can still detect a small effect (MDES of 0.22), while accounting for 10% attrition, which is appropriate given that studies on parent interventions have demonstrated a larger effect size on parent empowerment (SMD = 0.57) (Amin et al., 2018). With the proposed sample of 228 educators and accounting for 10% attrition, the evaluation is powered to detect an MDES of 0.28 on staff surveys that measure collaboration. For RQ 3, to understand the impact on classroom culturally competence, we have a larger MDES of 0.48. While larger than the student, family, and overall staff effect sizes, these too are appropriate given the large amount of literature on the effect sizes of effective PD, which range from -0.82 *g* (which is equivalent to a negative effect) to 6.62 *g*

(which is well above the 0.8 convention for a large effect) for ratings of observed classroom quality (Egert et al., 2018). See Appendix J.10 for more detail.

Measures. WWC standards require that outcome measures demonstrate face validity, are reliable, are collected in the same way across conditions, and are not over aligned to their intervention. All proposed measures for the RSS evaluation meet these requirements (see Appendix J.7 for more details). For RQ 1, we will use a mix of extant data and primary child-level assessments and teacher reports. First, to measure kindergarten readiness, we will use the Michigan KRA and Teaching Strategies GOLD—both of which are valid, reliable, and policy-relevant assessments used in Flint. To measure language, we will use PPVT-4 (Dunn & Dunn, 2007) and PLS-5 (Zimmerman et al., 2011)—both of which demonstrate high reliability and validity. To measure social emotional competence, we will use DECA (LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2012) and MEFS (Carlson & Zelazo, 2014). Although DECA is a teacher report (which may introduce some bias), it is appropriate to include because it is already used in Flint. To address this concern, we also included the MEFS, which is a direct measure of executive functioning. Lastly, we will use a variation of the Preschool Racial Attitudes Measure–II (PRAM II), which is based on the classic Doll Task (Clark & Clark, 1947), to directly assess young children's racial identity and attitudes.

To answer RQ 2, we will use two family surveys: PSMTSS (Giallo et al., 2008) and an adapted version of PAKAS (Lian & Fontanez-Phelan, 2001). PAKAS was initially developed for use with Latino families, so we will adapt it, with input from the expert panel, to be relevant for Black families in Flint. To answer RQ 3, we will use ACSES (Curenton et al., 2020). ACSES measures five factors of cultural competence in the classroom: challenging status quo knowledge, equitable learning opportunities for racially minoritized learners, equitable

discipline, connections to home life, and personalized learning opportunities. ACSES has high internal consistency and correlates with the CLASS, another widely used measure of classroom quality. To answer RQ 4, we will use the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory, 3rd Edition (Mattessich et al., 2001). This tool measures, with high reliability across subscales, community collaboration or cooperation, flexibility, and open and frequent communication.

To understand the impact of RSS on the proposed outcomes (RQ 1–4), we must first document fidelity of implementation (RQs 5 and 6). Through attendance records, satisfaction surveys, and meeting notes, AIR will monitor the dosage of all participants in each training and activity (see Exhibit 3 and Appendix J.8 for more details). We also will evaluate satisfaction with the RSS trainings based on participant feedback on satisfaction surveys collected after training.

Analyses of Impact (RQs 1-4). Analyses for RQs 1–4 will estimate the impact of RSS on family, student, and educator outcomes (see Appendix J.11 for more detail). To preserve the integrity of random assignment of our efficacy analyses, we will use intent-to-treat analyses that estimate the impact of the initiative on teachers and their students. To answer RQs 1 and 2 on family and student outcomes, we will compare the average scores for the treatment and control groups using a hierarchical linear model with families and students nested in classrooms with preschool fixed effects. The models will include family and child background characteristics at Level 1 (e.g., gender, age, parental education and employment, family composition) and treatment status—whether or not the student or family was assigned to a classroom in which teachers received RSS training or business as usual. Models will also include whether the child is attending an elementary school that participated in RSS. Preschool-fixed effects (or blocks) ensure that only teachers and school leaders in the same school are compared with one another. To answer RQs 3 and 4 on impacts of RSS on teacher and school leaders' culturally competent

instruction and collaboration among preschool and K–12 education settings in Flint, we will estimate a two-level hierarchical model with teachers nested in schools. We will also include teacher and classroom covariates to increase the precision of our impact estimates.

Analyses of Program Implementation (RQs 5 and 6). To document the fidelity of implementation and the barriers to and successes of implementation, AIR will first develop an implementation rubric at the classroom and school levels. AIR will use the rubric to assign a fidelity score to each treatment classroom and school. The rubric will specify the data sources (attendance records, teacher surveys, coach logs etc.) used to rate each indicator of implementation, along with the threshold for demonstrating low, medium, and high levels of fidelity (see Appendix J.8 for implementation measures). AIR will also qualitatively analyze focus group data to understand barriers and challenges to implementing RSS.

D.2. Methods of Evaluation for Performance Feedback and Progress Toward Outcomes

AIR will provide actionable performance feedback on an ongoing basis to CFGF and our partners in Flint. We will develop implementation measures and associated thresholds for the RSS core components to assess implementation fidelity (see Section B.2). Based on a review of randomized controlled trials that produce the intended impacts (Durlak & Dupre, 2008), the initial proposed thresholds for low (<60%), moderate (60–80%), and high (80%+) fidelity levels are based on the percentage of participants (educators, school leaders, and families) who participate in all core components. Project documentation records and attendance records are commonly used metrics for assessing implementation fidelity (Mowbray et al., 2003), and the proposed thresholds (a) meet the criteria for high fidelity as defined by a review of the implementation literature (Hill & Erickson, 2019) and (b) permit further exploration of productive adaptations to inform continued program improvement (Quinn & Kim, 2017).

Formative data collection will inform continuous improvement throughout the project. Given that AIR leads the Flint early childhood RPP meetings. We plan to embed the RSS project objectives into future agendas for the monthly RPP meetings. Through these meetings, we can gather feedback on design and implementation questions. Data dialogues will occur quarterly to provide an opportunity for school leadership, educators, and families to engage in joint discussions about data to understand and inform RSS implementation and outcomes.

AIR will also provide interim and final reports to the Design Team. In phases 1 and 2, AIR will provide interim reports that (a) summarize in-depth findings about implementation fidelity, barriers, and facilitators and (b) highlight opportunities for refinement. During Phase 3, AIR will prepare an annual interim report to share preliminary impact findings and a formal evaluation report in Year 5 that includes the final results and lessons learned. AIR will also create, with input from expert panel members and families, a series of family-friendly infographics that presents key findings throughout the implementation (see Appendix J.12).

D.3. Contribution of the Proposed Project to Increase Knowledge

The proposed project will increase understanding of how to solve the educational problem of challenging transitions to kindergarten, with a special focus on cultural competence. Strategies to address implicit bias early in schooling are critical because educational institutions are riddled with racial discrimination and children develop their racial identities and attitudes during early childhood. This project has the potential to be a model for shifting the PK–12 system toward one of effective, culturally-competent collaboration that supports Black families and students. The project also holds the promise of changing educators' and school leaders' experiences through innovative racial equity trainings and facilitated dialogues about implicit bias. Together with direct family engagement activities to build families' skills to advocate for

their children long after kindergarten, if funded, this multisystem intervention may have long-lasting effects in the Flint community and beyond.

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