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Executive Summary

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy our mission is **to partner with the community to provide a 6-12th grade educational experience that empowers and prepares all scholars to recognize the fullness of their identity to determine, pursue, and succeed in the future of their choice.** We will realize this mission by honoring the gifts of our local context, The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, and leverage those gifts to cultivate scholars' minds (intellect), hearts (character), and hands (skills). The only school in Beaufort County whose educational model has been co-designed by community members and serves the 6th – 12th grade span, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will continue to work alongside the community to enrich scholars' educational experiences in our Target Community, Northern Beaufort County. Four key features of the school model and design will provide the foundation for improving the academic achievement of all scholars—**personalized learning, place-based instruction, proactive school climate, and powered by the community**—these key features will be defined below in alignment with *Section 59-40-20 of the South Carolina Code of Laws*. Our mission clearly supports the purpose of South Carolina Charter Schools as stated in *Section 59-40-20 of the South Carolina Code of Laws*:

- (1) **Improve student learning:** By providing a nationally vetted and highly rigorous curriculum to scholars, as well as high-quality, data-driven professional development to educators, scholars will be given access to **personalized learning** experiences to improve scholar learning. These experiences begin with a multiage, open-concept classroom model. Inspired by Montessori best practices, our learning environment prioritizes small-group instructional rotations of high-quality curricula. This structural choice gives all scholars more access to personalized, targeted support. Furthermore, our narrative will discuss our Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). This goal-setting and progress monitoring document will be afforded to all scholars at Sea Islands Heritage Academy. The tools and structures we maintain create the conditions by which all scholars have steps and benchmarks toward improved scholar learning.
- (2) **Increase learning opportunities for students:** Operating on a year-round calendar, Sea Islands Heritage Academy scholars will have two, multi-weeklong Intersessions. As we are **powered by community**, Intersessions will serve as an opportunity for scholars to broaden career pathways and deeper learning experiences rooted in the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.
- (3) **Encourage the use of a variety of productive teaching methods** and (5) **create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site** : Through practicing the philosophy and high engagement practices of **place-based instruction**, described in David Sobel's 2004 book *Place-based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities*, scholars are immersed in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities, and experiences, using these as a foundation for the study of language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. Place-based instruction emphasizes learning through participation in service projects for the local school and/or community, leveraging a variety of productive teaching models.¹ This instructional model will require intentional, consistent, and immersive professional development opportunities for educators—rooted in local heritage and scholar achievement strategies.
- (4) **Establish new forms of accountability for schools:** To hold ourselves accountable to a **proactive school climate**, we will leverage an advisory structure named the House System. This structure is the cornerstone of maintaining consistent, positive, and direct family engagement. Moreover, we will have an established Community Council. This council will function like an Advisory Council; however, it will be composed of former co-design team members, parents, and community stakeholders. The Community Council will perform quarterly step-backs, where they examine Sea Islands Heritage Academy artifacts (scholar projects, assessment trends, survey results, etc.) and determine if we are implementing our key design elements with fidelity. This innovative form of accountability holds Sea Islands Heritage Academy to the expectations set forth in this application.

The remaining purposes outlined in *Section 59-40-20 of the South Carolina Code of Laws* (6) **assist South Carolina in reaching academic excellence**; and (7) **create new, innovative, and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system, with the goal of closing achievement gaps between low performing student groups and high performing student groups**, are also supported by our school. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our primary goal is to ensure an equitable educational experience for scholars throughout Beaufort County. Our innovative approach, beginning with our community co-design process, highlights an asset-based commitment to sustaining and leveraging the local Gullah Geechee heritage. With

¹ Hall, Christina M. (2020) "The Impact of Family Engagement on Student Achievement," *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*: Vol. 22 Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1327>

high quality education, intentional community partnerships, and a foundation of consistent family engagement,

Sea Islands Heritage Academy creates the conditions by which we can strive toward reaching South Carolina's academic excellence while closing achievement gaps.

Among Beaufort County's nearly 200,000 residents, about 10% live in poverty as reported in the most recent census. This poverty, however, is not equally distributed throughout the county. In Northern Beaufort County, our intended service area, some neighborhoods serve students where the rate of students in poverty is as high as 80%. The poverty rate of residents of color in Beaufort, South Carolina is dramatically higher than the national average at nearly 40%.² As with most communities across the country, poverty is far too often inextricably linked with poor education outcomes for students that significantly limit their opportunities to lead fulfilled lives as adults. Without disaggregating the data by subgroup, in 2022 nearly 71% of all scholars are leaving elementary school not Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on SCReady in Math and ELA. When we disaggregate the data there is a nearly 25% gap between all students who Meet or Exceed proficiency and the number of Non-White students who Meet or Exceed proficiency in those schools.

Furthermore, the graduation rates among students of color at Northern Beaufort County high school have typically been below 80%.³ At those same high schools, 7 out of every 10 scholars will not be enrolled as college freshmen, as reported by the 2018-2019 S.C. High School Completers Enrolled in 2019-20 College Freshman Classes in South Carolina and Other States. When averaged, this represents a 38.3% gap between college freshman in our target communities and the 67.2% of scholars statewide that entered as college freshman in 2019. This gap makes our work particularly urgent as an average of nearly 10% of graduating scholars specified "other activities" as their post-secondary plans according to 2018-2019 S.C. High School Completers Enrolled in 2019-20 College Freshman Classes in South Carolina and Other States. Despite the current reality, scholars in Northern Beaufort County are uniquely positioned to leverage the resiliency and ingenuity of the local Gullah Geechee community to carve a career pathway for themselves. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy our innovative model will create the conditions by which that is possible. We believe all scholars deserve access to a high quality educational option that meets their unique needs and prepares them for success once they graduate from high school— whether they attend the college of their choice or build gainful and meaningful careers. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we recognize the urgency and need for a high-quality 6-12th grade option; throughout our narrative, our understanding and response to this need are evident.

Our Founding Committee has a variety of strengths and skills that best serves to address the needs Sea Islands Heritage Academy will address. Our Founding Committee includes an attorney, a former policy maker, a special educator, a school administrator, Design Team Members, Gullah Geechee scholars, historians, business owners, public relations professionals, parents, and non-profit executive directors— all who believe deeply in the importance of high- quality education in sustaining a community. Nearly 50% of prospective board members were born in and attended school in Beaufort County. All members of our founding group reside in South Carolina and have a deep personal connection to the Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor. We all deeply believe in the story of resilience *the place* (Northern Beaufort County) offers; however, we also acknowledge the threat that continued educational inequity places on the community we deeply value. In founding a school, we seek to improve academic outcomes by leaning into the assets the community possesses. Our combined skills offer strength in legal, commerce, politics, public relations, development, non-profit management, and education giving us the capacity necessary to oversee Sea Islands Heritage Academy.

In opening Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we will leverage the place—The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor— to create an educational experience that **empowers and prepares all scholars to recognize the fullness of their identity to determine, pursue, and succeed in the future of their choice.**

² American Community Survey. "MEDIAN INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2019 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)." Explore Census Data, data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=ZCTAS 29920 Income and Poverty&tid=ACST5Y2019.S1903&hidePreview=false

³ South Carolina Department of Education. "2019 SC Ready Data." *District Scores by Grade Level and Demographic Category*, 2019, ed.sc.gov/data/test-scores/state-assessments/scready/2019/district-scores-by-grade-level-and-demographic-category/?districtCode=0701.

SECTION 1: EDUCATIONAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

1.Evidence of Community Need and Support

At Sea Island Heritage Academy, our mission is **to partner with the community to provide a 6th-12th grade educational experience that empowers and prepares all scholars to recognize the fullness of**

their identities to determine, pursue, and succeed in the future of their choice. Community voices and aspirations drive the methods by which we ensure scholar achievement gaps are closed and scholar learning is improved. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we leverage *place* as a tool of innovation in its relevance in our academic programming and systems.

Historical Context:

On January 12, 2017, President Barack Obama established Beaufort County as home to the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park sites. In his speech, President Obama said the four Reconstruction Era historical sites “tell stories of experimentation, potential transformation, hope, accomplishment, and disappointment”. The recognition of Reconstruction Era illuminated its antecedent, the Civil War.

In a decree following the Emancipation Proclamation, General William T. Sherman defined the land in parts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida explicitly for freedmen (as illustrated in **Appendix C, Figure 2**): “The islands from Charleston south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. John’s River, Fla., are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the negroes now made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the President of the United States” (Sherman, 1865).¹ This defining order created the opportunity for the freedmen living on the lands to profit from their work and financially thrive. The amalgamation of the West African cultures reflected across the freedmen became known as the diasporic heritage, Gullah Geechee. Gen. Sherman’s Special Order established what is now known as the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. The Corridor currently spans the coastal region from Wilmington, North Carolina, to St. Augustine, Florida.

¹Special Field Orders, No. 15, Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi, 16 Jan. 1865, Orders & Circulars, series 44, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives.



Beaufort County is the intended physical location of the Sea Islands Heritage Academy. It is also one of the eight counties represented in the South Carolina portion of The Corridor. Beaufort County is split by the Broad River, a tidal channel that flows between the mainland on the West and Port Royal and Parris islands on the East. Prior to the bridges' construction, the Sea Islands remained isolated, preserving the fidelity of many Gullah Geechee practices. However, as accessibility to the Sea Islands grew, so did the makeup of Sea Island residents. This shift in demographic has pushed native populations to smaller, concentrated pockets of Gullah Geechee communities. These communities have persisted until today. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we intend to amplify the place based practices and beliefs of these pocket communities to drive relevant instruction.

The uniquely positioned cultural relevance of St. Helena, the intended location for Sea Islands Heritage Academy, is highlighted in the 2020 Beaufort County Comprehensive Plan with recognition of St. Helena as a Cultural Protection Overlay (CPO) Zone. As such, "the CPO zone acknowledges St. Helena's historic cultural landscape and its importance as a center of Beaufort County's most notable concentrations of Gullah vulture." The Beaufort Chambers of Commerce 2022 Prosperity Report cites the St. Helena Island region (inclusive of St. Helena Islands, Lady's Islands, and surrounding barrier islands) as the area in Northern Beaufort County with the most anticipated growth in the coming years with a rate of 1.4. A rate higher than any other Northern Beaufort area. The unique combination of historic and cultural relevance to population growth makes Northern Beaufort County the right target community for Sea Islands Heritage Academy.

Within Beaufort County, the areas known as St. Helena Island (29920) and Seabrook (29940) have remained cultural hubs for Gullah Geechee heritage. St. Helena Island is home to two of four Reconstruction National Park Sites—the Penn Center and Brick Baptist Church. The Penn Center and Brick Baptist Church have been established as sites that embody the sufficiency and resilience characteristic of Gullah Geechee heritage. In Appendix C, please find local organizations' commitment to further scholar enrichment and advance learning **Section I.2.1**. These organizations reflect the community-identified sectors—arts, history, natural resources, and civics— necessary to understand

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local heritage. Organizations include arts-focused organizations, such as ResponsibleArtistry and the Gullah Kinfolk Traveling Theater; culturally focused organizations, such as Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor and the University of South Carolina at Beaufort (USCB); natural resource-focused

organizations, such as the South Carolina Department Of Natural Resources ACE Basin NERR, Gullah Farmers Co-op, Earth People Farm, Marshview Farms, and Morning Glory Homestead; and civics-focused organizations such as Conservation Voters of South Carolina, The Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce, and several local delegate offices (**Section I.1.3**). The organizations mentioned above pledged both their support of Sea Islands Heritage Academy, as well as a commitment to working with our scholars in the future.

In her working paper “Promoting, Persevering and Prospering: How the Gullah/Geechee Community can Leverage a Living Monument,” Dr. Najmah Thomas, Associate Professor at the University of South Carolina at Beaufort explores the anticipated impact of Reconstruction Era National Park sites on the affirmation of Gullah Geechee heritage:

Gullah/Geechee culture is characterized by self-determination and self-sufficiency; it is defiantly African and distinctively place-based. Created by the human will of Africans from multiple sections of the West Coast of Africa who were enslaved on isolated plantations along the southeast coast, Gullah/Geechee culture constitutes the only group of African Americans who maintained a significant amount of Africanisms including foodways, land use practices, subsistence fishing, and the spoken Gullah language (Turner, Mille, and Montgomery, 2002), Goodwine, 1998, Politzer, 1999, Hazzard, 2012). For centuries, Gullah/Geechee communities sustained a way of life predicated on the wealth of close-knit family compounds, and carefully nurtured the resources of the land and water (Dean, 2013).

Leveraging what Dr. Thomas identified as “distinctly place-based” cultural identity, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will honor the gifts of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Corridor to support scholars in **determining, pursuing, and succeeding in the future of their choice**. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we will do this both in our academic programming; as well as provide extended time (both in the daily schedule and scheduled Intersessions) for scholars to explore their place-based identities. Scholars will do this by participating in Community Engagement time, outlined in **Appendix F, Yearly Calendar and Daily Schedule**. During this time, scholars will participate in programming developed and executed by community organizations and supported, in part, by USCB Human Services interns. Please reference **Appendix C-3 Letters of Support** for USCB’s letter of support in assigning interns to Sea Islands Heritage Academy throughout USCB’s three semesters. Furthermore, our Intersession, discussed further in this narrative, creates opportunities for scholars to participate in internships that connect to local heritage. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we believe deeply in the assets provided by our local community. Throughout this narrative, you will find evidence of how we leverage *place* to support improved scholar outcomes.

Evident by its Reconstruction Era National Historical Park sites, Beaufort County remains the heart of Reconstruction and the heartbeat of Gullah Geechee heritage. Placing Sea Islands Heritage Academy in the heartbeat of Gullah Geechee heritage creates a unique opportunity for the community to drive student achievement.

Demographics:

As of 2019, Beaufort County is home to 192,122 residents. According to 2019 Estimated United States

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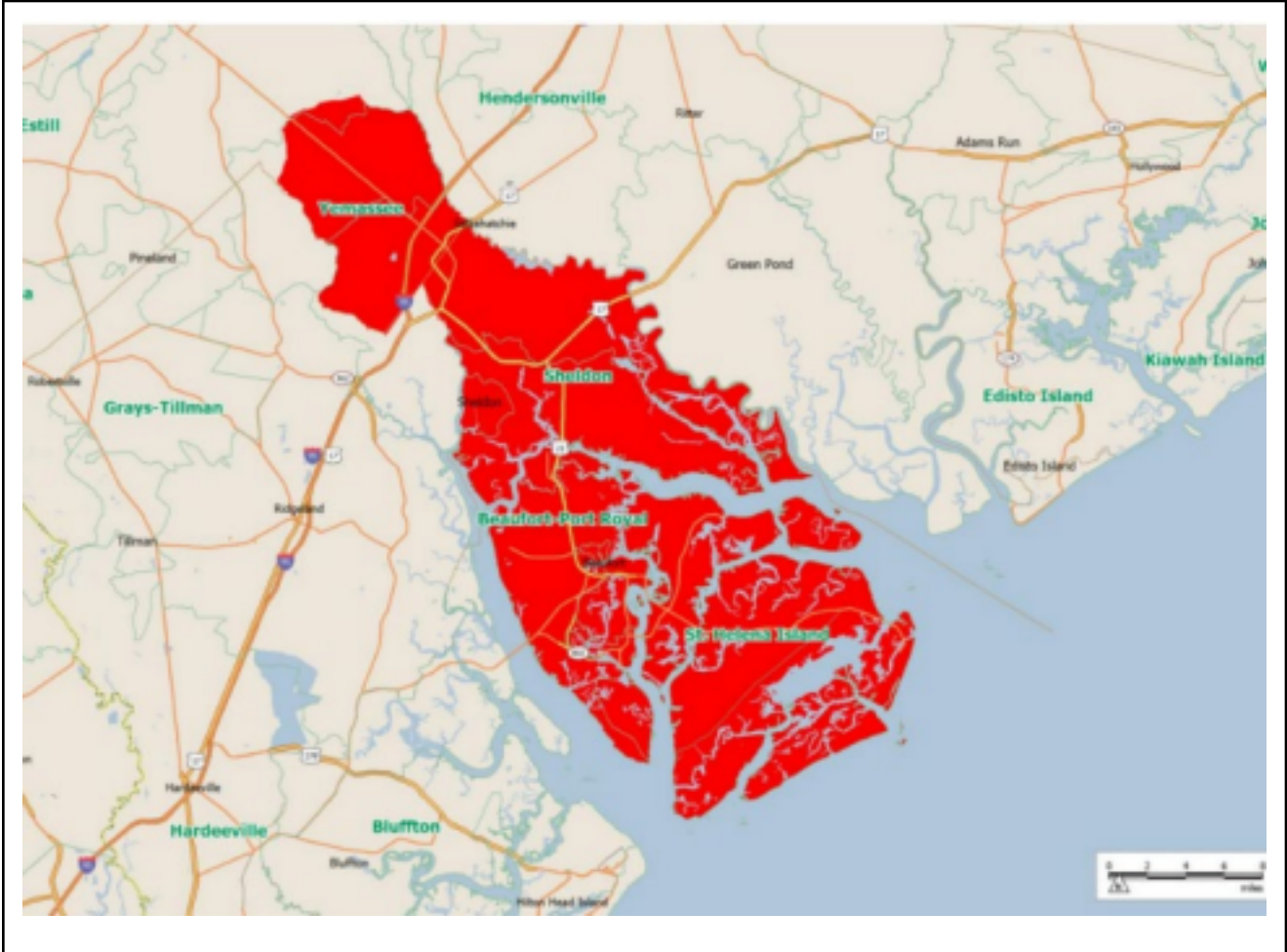
Census, the demographics of the city are as follows:

- White alone, 69.2%

- Black or African American alone, 17.9%
- Asian alone, 1.5%
- Two or More Races, 1.9%
- Hispanic or Latino, 11.1%

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county has a total area of 923 square miles. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we intend to be an open-enrollment public charter school, open to scholars throughout Beaufort County at large, as well as the state of South Carolina (if we are authorized by the South Carolina Public Charter School District). Considering the county’s size, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will be physically located in Northern Beaufort County. Please see **Appendix C, Figure 4**, which identifies the entirety of the Northern Beaufort County region which we have identified as our Target Community.

Figure 4: Map of Target Community - Northern Beaufort County Region



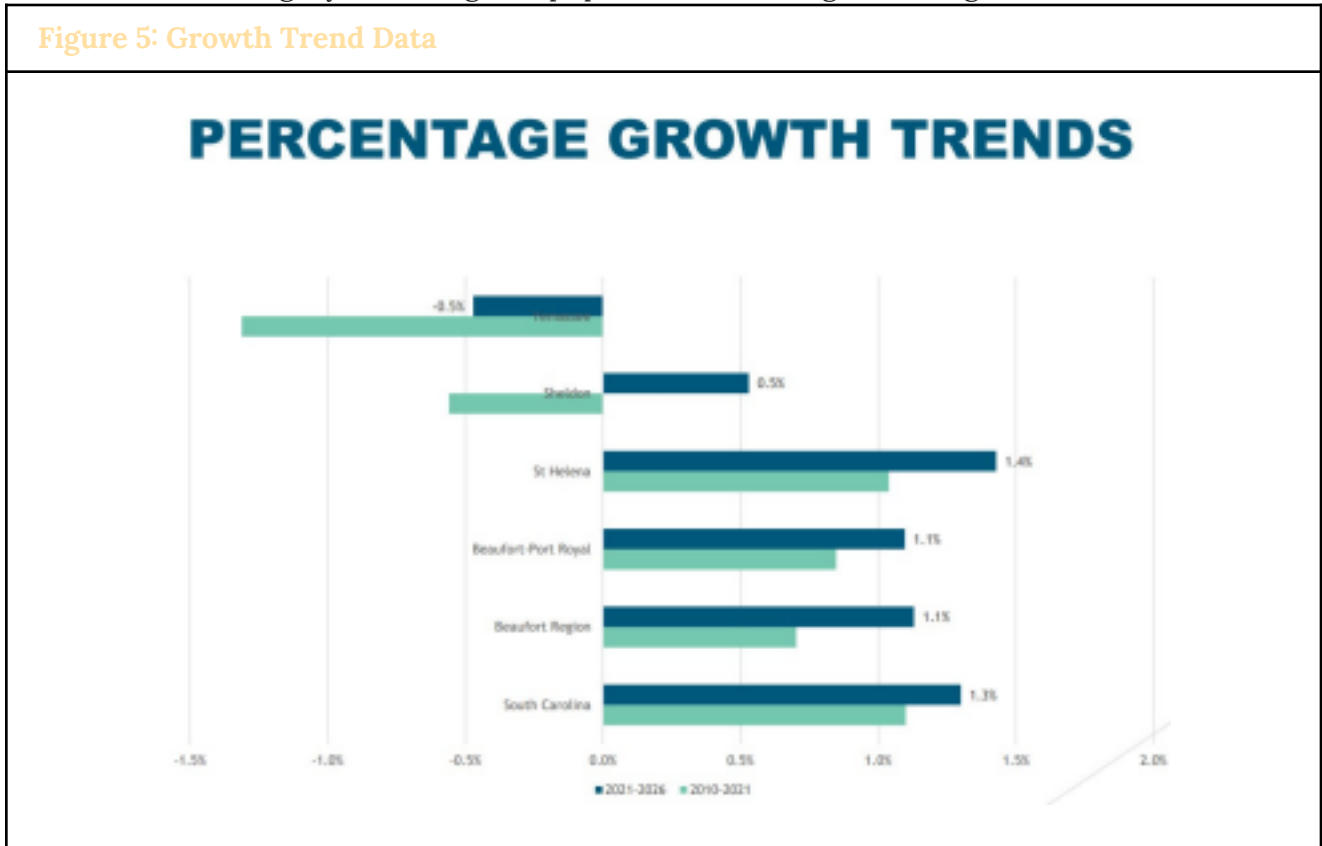
Throughout Beaufort County, the area identified as the St. Helena Region (inclusive of the municipality of Lady’s Island and the unincorporated, St. Helena Island) shows the highest rate of growth in Northern Beaufort County at 1.4%. **Appendix C, Figure 5** indicates the percentage growth trends throughout

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Northern Beaufort County, illustrating that by 2026 the St. Helena Region will outperform statewide growth by .1% and region wide growth by .3%. In fact, Beaufort County School District has already identified a prospective site for a new elementary school (Springfield) in anticipation of this growth. Considering the growth potential in our target area of Northern Beaufort County, the place-based

instruction we offer at Sea Islands Heritage Academy creates an innovative opportunity to retain the rich and historied legacy of the region’s population, including school-aged children.

Figure 5: Growth Trend Data



Furthermore, at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we have identified two Priority Zones. Our Priority Zones are located within our Target Community (Northern Beaufort County). Priority Zones represent the most underserved area within our Target Community. We intend to take special care to recruit heavily in our Priority Zones. We will not pull students exclusively from our identified Priority Zone, but we have identified zones where students and community currently have the most need; therefore, our recruitment strategies focus heavily on our Priority Zones. Throughout our narrative, data from our target community of Northern Beaufort County and our identified Priority Zones will illustrate the need for Sea Islands Heritage Academy.

Using data from the Beaufort Chamber of Commerce, SC Report Cards, and US Census data, we have determined two zip codes that offer the most academic, social, and economic gaps are 29920 and 29940. Figure 6 shows for those zip codes shows that residents most often reflect Gullah Geechee heritage. Data for St. Helena Island and Seabrook are as follows:

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Figure 6: Priority Zones Demographic Data

Race	29940 (Seabrook, SC)	29920 (St Helena Island, SC)

White	33.3%	41.1%
Black Or African American	63.8%	54.8%
Asian	0.2%	0.2%
Other Race	0.9%	2.0%
Two Or More Races	1.7%	1.5%

Figure 7 outlines the income by race in the Seabrook (29940) and St Helena Island (29920) ². In zip codes identified to be more densely populated by Gullah Geechee descendants, there is, on average, a \$33,989 racial income gap. Studies have shown that socioeconomic status is a significant determinant of scholar achievement. While assessing community need through individual empathy interviews via 1:1 Meetings (see **Appendix C-3 Evidence of Support**), the importance of equitable economic development, predetermined by educational development, was a common theme by the community. Sea Islands Heritage Academy provides a unique opportunity to prepare scholars for the career of their choice, rooted in local heritage.

Figure 7:

- White, \$62,778 - 29940 (Seabrook, SC), \$72,384- 29920 (St Helena Island, SC)
- Black, \$32,288 - 29940 (Seabrook, SC), \$34,899- 29920 (St Helena Island, SC)
- Asian, n/a - 29940 (Seabrook, SC), \$90,714- 29920 (St Helena Island, SC)

Figure 7: 2019 Average Income by Race in Priority Zones		
Race	29940 (Seabrook, SC)	29920 (St Helena Island, SC)
White	\$62,778	\$72,384
Black Or African American	\$32,288	\$34,899
Asian		\$90,714

* No data applicable for the following subgroups: Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander, Other Race, Two or More Races

Throughout Beaufort County, poverty is not equally distributed. Although Beaufort County is one of the wealthiest county in South Carolina, with a growth of nearly 22% in the last ten years³, communities of Gullah Geechee descendants have yet to benefit from this growth. As illustrated in the most recent census, Black residents of Beaufort County are more likely to be in poverty at a rate of 34.5% and

² American Community Survey. "MEDIAN INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2019 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)." Explore Census Data, data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=ZCTA5 29920 Income and Poverty&tid=ACST5Y2019.S1903&hidePreview=false.

³ Beaufort County School District. "4 Year Demographic Trends." Beaufort Schools Instructional Services , Data Services , 2017, beaufortschools.net.

Hispanic residents 16%. This poverty rate is dramatically higher than the national average of 10.9%. This disparity reflects the gaps in academic data described in the Educational Landscape below. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we see the challenges impacting the local community as an opportunity for an innovative approach. The need for Sea Islands Heritage Academy reflects the need to create economic sustainability for a community whose resilient history can be the foundation for increased scholar achievement.

Educational Landscape:

Beaufort County educates 22,405 students. Of those students, 41% identify as White, 31% as Black, 25% as Hispanic or Latino, 2% as Asian, 1% of two or more races, and 56% of scholars identify as Pupils-In Poverty.⁴

In the FY22 135-day count, there were 3,119 scholars in 4th and 5th grades; upon approval, those scholars will be eligible for our 150-seat year 1 enrollment at Sea Islands Heritage Academy in FY25. We plan to serve **585** 6th-12th grade scholars, accounting for about 5% of the total number of actively enrolled scholars in the Beaufort County School district.

Total # Actively Enrolled Students	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
11,274	1,563	1,625	1,674	1,950	1,713	1,413	1,336

With 225 scholars in our middle school and 360 in our high school, we will maintain a 15:1 student-to-staff ratio in both our middle and high schools. This ratio compares favorably to the options parents in Northern Beaufort County currently have. Below you will see data from 2021 the SC Report Card that shows scholar to teacher ratio in core subjects in local middle schools:

- Beaufort Middle School 19.2 to 1
- Lady's Island Middle School (LIM) 21.2 to 1
- Whale Branch Middle School 18.8 to 1
- Robert Smalls International Academy (RSIA) 18.4 to 1

According to Beaufort County's 135 Day count, at Northern Beaufort County middle school options (Beaufort Middle School, LIM, Whale Branch, and RSIA), there is an average of 409 scholars enrolled; Northern Beaufort County high schools (Beaufort High School, Whale Branch Early College, and Battery Creek High School) enrollment ranges from 438 scholars to nearly 1,200 scholars and have an average of 799 scholars enrolled from 9-12th grades. Considering our 225-scholar cap in middle school and 360

⁴ Lena Groeger, Annie Waldman. "Miseducation: Beaufort County School District." *ProPublica*, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, Stanford University'

scholar cap in high school, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will be able to not only fulfill its mission, but

also ensure enrollment capacity is met throughout its life.

As evidenced by **Figure 8**, scholars in our Priority Zones have a greater likelihood of attending traditional zoned public school than a private or charter school; however, data shows scholars in our Priority Zones are not well served. The figure below illustrates that less than 20% of scholars are proficient in ELA or Math. In our target communities, it is evident that access to high-performing public schools of choice is necessary. Figure 9 shows the zone schools for students from St. Helena Island (29920) and Seabrook (29940), pupils in poverty, and as well as average proficiency. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our robust community engagement and recruitment strategies, described throughout our narrative, began in 2020 and continue to work to elevate the voices, experiences, and desires of the community.

Figure 8: Number of School Age Children Enrolled in School in Target Community ^{5 6}		
	29940 (Seabrook, SC) ¹⁰	29920 (St Helena Island, SC) ¹¹
Number of School Aged Children (Age 3-17)	1035	1663
Percentage Enrolled in Traditional Public School	87%	86%
Percentage Enrolled in Private School	10%	3%

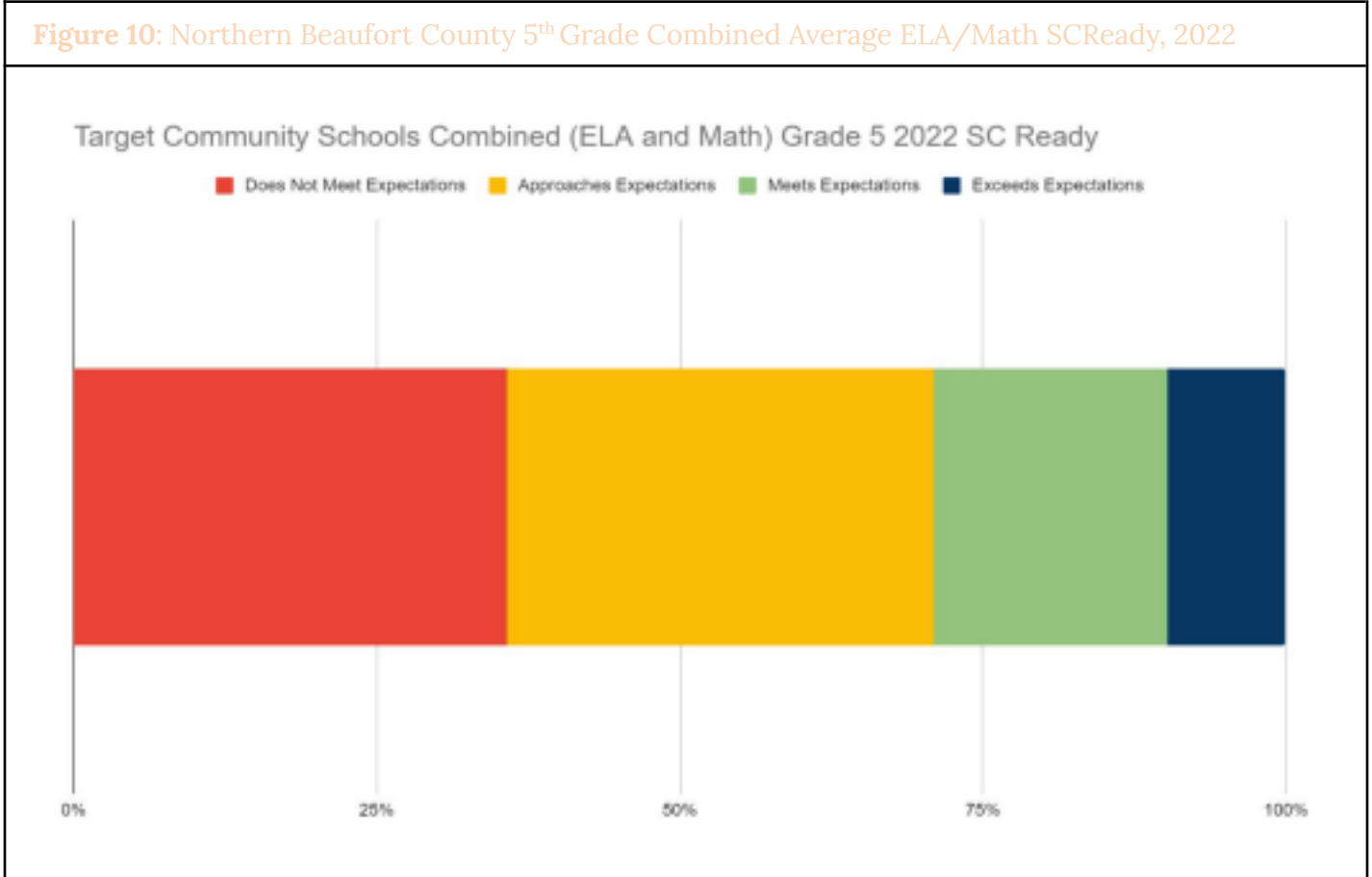
Figure 9: Target Community Academic Data ⁷			
School	Attendance Zone	% Pupils in Poverty	Percent of students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on average in Math and ELA
Whale Branch Elementary	Seabrook (29940)	93%	16.85%
Whale Branch Middle		89%	19.36%
Whale Branch Early High School		77%	
St. Helena Elementary (only school in zip code)	St Helena Island (29920)	91%	25.18%
Lady's Island Middle ¹⁶		66%	16.83%
Beaufort High School		54%	

⁵ United States Postal Service, U.S. Census Bureau, Yahoo, Google, FedEx, and UPS. "ZIP Code 29940." ZIP Code 29940 Map, Demographics, More for Seabrook, SC, 2021, www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/29940/.

⁶ United States Postal Service, U.S. Census Bureau, Yahoo, Google, FedEx, and UPS. "ZIP Code 29920." ZIP Code 29920 Map, Demographics, More for St Helena Island, SC, 2021, www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/29940/.

⁷ South Carolina Department of Education. "2019 SC Ready Data." District Scores by Grade Level and

Although the intersection of need in our Priority Zones creates priority, Appendix C, Figure 10 illustrates the academic need throughout Northern Beaufort County at-large. Without disaggregating the data by subgroup, in 2022 nearly 71% of all scholars leave elementary school not having met Expectations on SCReady in Math and ELA.



Moreover, Appendix C, Figure 11 disaggregates the data by the total number of students and non-White students in schools in our target community of Northern Beaufort County. This data illustrates that in Northern Beaufort County, there is a nearly 25% gap between all students who Meet or Exceed proficiency and the number of Non-White students who Meet or Exceed proficiency in those schools. Not all students benefit from existing programs and need a school to help increase proficiency rates and close the achievement gap in the district. Sea Islands Heritage Academy intends to be that school.

Figure 11: SCReady 2022 Data for Target Area (Northern Beaufort County) Elementary and High School

Target Community Schools	Data Set	Does Not Meet Expectations (Level 1)	Approaches Expectations (Level 2)	Meets Expectations (Level 3)	Exceeds Expectations
		High School End-of-Course Assessment in English language arts (English 1) and Math (Algebra 1) Grade: F	High School End-of-Course Assessment in English language arts (English 1) and Math (Algebra 1) Grade: D	High School End-of-Course Assessment in English language arts (English 1) and Math (Algebra 1) Grade: C	High School End-of-Course Assessment in English language arts (English 1) and Math (Algebra 1) Grade: A-B
Beaufort Elementary	ELA (All)	11.90%	35.60%	27.10%	25.40%
Beaufort Elementary	Math (All)	22.00%	33.90%	22.00%	22.00%
Beaufort Elementary	ELA (Non White Students)	17.60%	44.10%	29.40%	8.80%
Beaufort Elementary	Math (Non White Students)	43.30%	40.00%	10.00%	6.70%
LIM	ELA (All)	25.00%	46.90%	21.90%	6%
LIM	Math (All)	28.10%	31.30%	31.30%	9%

LIM	ELA (Non White Students)	18.20%	54.50%	27.30%	0%
LIM	Math (Non White Students)	27.30%	31.80%	36.40%	4.50%
SHES	ELA (All)	23.10%	42.30%	34.60%	0%
SHES	Math (All)	34.10%	36.60%	22.00%	7%
SHES	ELA (Non White Students)	34.40%	43.80%	21.90%	0%
SHES	Math (Non White Students)	40.60%	34.40%	18.80%	6.30%
Coosa	ELA (All)	4.40%	22.20%	42.20%	31.10%

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Coosa ELA (PIP) 14.30% 28.60% 23.80% 33.30%					
Coosa	Math (All)	13.30%	31.10%	13.30%	42.20%
Coosa	Math (PIP)	38.10%	23.80%	14.30%	23.80%
Whale Branch Middle	ELA (All)	50.00%	34.80%	15.20%	0%
Whale Branch Middle	Math (All)	30.80%	42.30%	19.20%	8%
Whale Branch Middle	ELA (Non- White Students)	50.00%	33.30%	16.70%	0%
Whale Branch Middle	Math (Non- White)	72.90%	16.70%	8.30%	2.10%

	Students)				
Shaklin	ELA (All)	39.70%	45.60%	9%	6%
Shaklin	Math (All)	66.20%	23.50%	9%	2%
Shaklin	ELA (Latino)	73.50%	26.50%	0%	0%
Shaklin	ELA	38.20%	58.80%	2.90%	0%
Shaklin	ELA (Non- White Students)	55.85%	42.65%	1.45%	0.00%
Shaklin	Math (Latino)	63.60%	18.20%	18.20%	0%
Shaklin	Math	73.50%	26.50%	0%	0%
	Math (Non- White Students)	68.55%	22.35%	9.10%	0.00%
Broad River	ELA (All)	18.20%	36.40%	25.80%	19.70%
Broad River	Math (All)	28.80%	25.80%	25.80%	19.70%
Broad River	Math (Non- White Students)	32.10%	28.60%	25.00%	14.30%
Broad River	ELA (Non- White Students)	21.40%	35.70%	21.40%	21.40%
RSIA	ELA (All)	34.20%	42.10%	15.80%	8%
RSIA	Math (All)	63.20%	26.30%	7.90%	3%

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RSIA	Math (Non White Students)	64.00%	32.00%	4.00%	0%
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RSIA	ELA (Non White Students)	33.30%	41.70%	25.00%	0%
Mossy Oaks I		30.60%	38.90%	11.10%	19.40%
Mossy Oaks		25.00%	38.90%	22.20%	13.90%
Port Royal	ELA (All)	23.10%	42.30%	34.60%	0%
Port Royal	Math (All)	30.80%	42.30%	19.20%	7.70%

According to the SC State Report Cards, state foals are defined as the following:

- 90% of Students at Level 2 or higher on following state assessments and 70% of Students at Level 3 or higher on following state assessments.
 - Level 2 (Approaching Expectations) has an equivalency of a D on the High School End-of-Course Assessment in English language arts (English 1) and Math (Algebra 1); Level 1 (Does Not Meet Expectations) has the equivalency of an F on the same exams.

Although there are schools within Beaufort County School District that meet these state defined goals, schools in Northern Beaufort County overall do not. Most acutely, schools in our Priority Zone communities' zone (St. Helena Elementary, Whale Branch Elementary, Whale Branch Middle and Lady's Islands Middle) do not meet that bar. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our educational philosophy and practices create a learning environment where scholars can not only meet or exceed state expectations in both ELA and math but also **succeed in the future of their choice.**

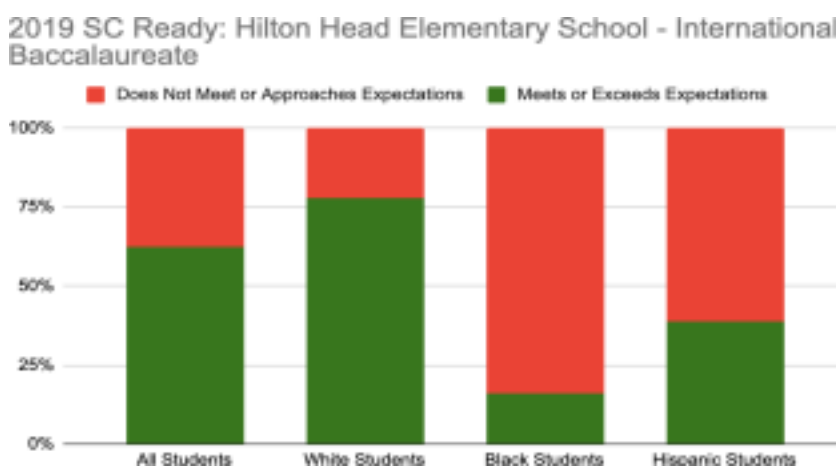
Figure 12: Map Indicating Schools in Target Community



as our Priority Zones. Although there is sustainable growth in our targeted, Northern Beaufort County, the density of the communities “South of the Broad,” leave limited schooling options on St. Helena Island (29920) and Seabrook (29940). As illustrated by **Figure 12**, Seabrook has a cluster of schools in the southern portion of the district; however, for scholars who live on St. Helena Island, there is only one school in the Attendance Zone—St. Helena Elementary, where less than 1/4 of scholars are proficient in ELA and Math. This data indicates the urgent need for an additional school option for scholars in our Priority Zones. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will provide students and families in Northern Beaufort County with a community-driven public school option for Grades 6-12. This innovative grade level grouping eliminates the transition between middle and high school. Research shows that transition can be difficult and negatively impact academics. No similar 6-12th grade public option exists. With the diverse needs and unique identity of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, the community needs an opportunity that understands and develops scholars' identities while preparing them for a fulfilled future.

Even in communities in Beaufort County that are more affluent, with less students of color, the reality of underperformance remains the same. Black students, representative of the Gullah Geechee diaspora, perform at a significant gap to their White counterparts. **Appendix C, Figure 13** illustrates the average elementary achievement by race at Hilton Head Elementary. Hilton Head’s International Baccalaureate program is one of the county’s most sought-after elementary schools. In a county of choice, scholars throughout the county *may* choose to enroll in the school outside of their zone if there is capacity. However, the driving distance between the outer bounds of our target communities and Hilton Head Elementary is between 1 hour and 1.5 hours—creating considerable barriers for scholars in 29920 and 29940 to attend. Moreover, despite Hilton Head Elementary’s high levels of student achievement, Black students are still gravely underserved. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we seek to offer an option of equity in education so that all students, including our Black and Hispanic students, meet or exceed expectations and show proficiency. **Appendix C, Figure 13** illustrates the proficiency rate of scholars at Hilton Head Elementary School, one of the better-performing schools in the district, with nearly 65% of scholars proficient. However, when disaggregating by race, it shows a disparity in the proficiency rates of scholars of color. Sea Islands Heritage Academy has been specifically designed to address these gaps.

Figure13: Proficiency rate of all scholars at Hilton Head Elementary



By assessing the elementary level’s academic need, we know the perpetuating gaps our middle and high school students may experience. We have leveraged peer-reviewed best practices to close these gaps. Analyzing elementary school data will allow us to best prepare for our incoming 6th and 7th graders being well below grade level. We have leveraged peer-reviewed practices to provide incoming middle

school scholars with the support they need to accelerate performance and close the gaps. Throughout our application’s narrative, we make clear that despite current educational inequity for scholars in our target areas, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will support scholars in increased academic achievement, as outlined in South Carolina Charter Law.

When considering the grade bands, grades 6-12, Alspaugh’s paper on the impact of grade level transition to support scholars’ academic achievement⁸ finds:

...The higher the transition grade level (the later the student transitions into the high school), the higher the dropout rate, most significantly for boys. Specifically, of the high school configurations studied (7-12, 9-12, and 10-12), the lowest high school dropout rates were seen in high schools where students transitioned in at grade 7...[this] suggests that the link between higher dropout rates and later-grade transition years is most likely attributed to the academic achievement loss commonly experienced during the transition year and the fact that students transitioning at grade 7, as opposed to grade 9 or 10, have more time to acclimate to high school.

As Sea Islands Heritage Academy will begin in 6th grade, we will offer fewer transitions to prepare scholars for long-term academic success better. **Figure 14** displays that, currently, Beaufort County schools with a non-white majority (Figure 14) have a higher high school dropout rate. Schools serving our Target Community's Priority Zone—Beaufort High and Whale Branch Early College High—have the highest dropout rates. This data illustrates the urgent need for scholars and families in our target communities to have a high-quality school option that prepares all scholars for the future of their choice.

Figure 14 Beaufort County Highschool Dropout Rate	
School Name	Percent Dropout Rate
Beaufort High	1.4
Hilton Head Is. High	0.4
Battery Creek High	1
Bluffton High	0.5
Whale Branch Early College High	1.1
May River High	0.1

Studies show that scholars who drop out typically live in poverty, which can continue for generations. According to the Department of Education, high school dropouts experienced a poverty rate of 30.8%, while those with at least a bachelor’s degree had a poverty rate of 13.5 %.⁹ Sea Islands Heritage Academy will implement programs to prevent dropout, notably our Individualized Learning Plans, described in detail in **Section I.2.2a: Instructional Model**, which provides consistent, personalized planning for scholars’ future.

Furthermore, in the schools with the highest dropout rate, scholars who graduate are less likely to be

⁸ Alspaugh, J. W. (1999). *The interaction effect of transition grade to high school with gender and grade level upon dropout rates.*

⁹ Breslow, J. M. (2012, June). *By the numbers: Dropping out of high school.* PBS. Retrieved January 13, 2023, from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/by-the-numbers-dropping-out-of-high-school/>

enrolled in college post-high school graduation. Moreover, data shows that less than a third of high school graduates enroll in college. Please refer to Section I.2.4: Goals, Objectives, and Assessment Plan, which exemplifies that Sea Islands Heritage Academy has set goals to ensure scholars not only enroll in college, but also enroll prepared to excel. Enrolling students in middle school and working with them to accelerate achievement informs our enrollment plan. **Appendix C, Figure 15** offers the post-high school plans of the Class of 2019 at Beaufort High and Whale Branch Early College High, as reported by the 2018-2019 S.C. High School Completers Enrolled in 2019-20 College Freshman Classes in South Carolina and Other States. The Figure illustrates the need for a 6th-12th grade school that supports scholars in planning for their future:

Figure 15: Class of 2019 Post HS Plans

WHALE BRANCH HIGH POST HS PLANS

- Freshman Class ■ Gainful Employment
- Armed Forces ■ Other Activities

BATTERY CREEK HIGH POST HS PLANS

- Freshman Class □ Gainful Employment
- Armed Forces □ Other Activities

Our analysis shows that at in Beaufort High and Whale Branch Early College High, the schools to which

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scholars in our Priority Zone are zoned, 7 out of 10 scholars will not enroll as college freshmen. When averaged, this represents a 38.3% gap between first-year college students in our target communities and the 67.2% of scholars statewide that entered as college freshman in 2019. This gap makes our work particularly urgent as an average of nearly 10% of scholars at Beaufort High and Whale Branch Early College High specified unknown “other activities” as their post-secondary plans. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we recognize the urgency and need for a high-quality schooling 6th-12th grade option; throughout our narrative, our understanding and response to this need are evident.

Appendix C, Figure 16, displays a further analysis of high schools in Beaufort County and shows the disparities, educational opportunities, and discipline across Beaufort County School District’s public high schools. Students in Seabrook (29940) attend Whale Branch Early College High School; while students from St. Helena Island are zoned to Beaufort High School, they often attend Battery Creek High School. As shown in **Appendix C, Figure 15**, the disparity between white students and Black students impacts scholars academically and behaviorally in all high schools in Beaufort County. .

Figure 16¹⁰

School	City	Non white Students	Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	High School Graduation Rate	Opportunity (White students are this many times as likely to be in an AP class, compared with Black students)	Discipline (Black students are this many times as likely to be suspended, compared with White students)
Whale Branch Early College High	Seabrook	86%	100%	Between 80% and 84%	Not available	2.9x
Hilton Head Island High	Hilton Head Island	46%	38%	89%	3.9x	4.9x
Bluffton High	Bluffton	52%	41%	84%	3.1x	2.2x
Battery Creek High	Beaufort	66%	61%	80%	2.7x	2.1x

¹⁰ Lena Groeger, Annie Waldman. “Miseducation: Beaufort County School District.” *ProPublica*, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, Stanford University’s Center for

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Beaufort High	Beaufort	49%	45%	85%	8.4x	4.1x
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When considering possible zip codes for the charter development towards educational equity, the Gullah Geechee communities of Beaufort County, specifically St. Helena Island in Northern Beaufort County stands out as a premier impact location due to (1) its proximity to cultural affirmation in the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, (2) its educational gaps mirroring the financial gaps, and (3) its need for college and career preparation in fields that address community needs and projected growth. While other middle and high schools exist in the area, none are effectively addressing the needs of the county's most vulnerable community. Despite its vulnerability, Sea Islands Heritage Academy leverages the community's assets to create the conditions for increased scholar learning.

Community assets are present in our instructional planning through integrated Place-Based Instruction, described in **Section I.2a**. Community assets are present in our educational structural choices, which allows ample time for community engagement, as evident in **Section I.2b**. We also bring the community into how we develop educators in understanding local assets, illustrated in **Section I.2d**. Throughout our narrative, our urgency in improved scholars' achievement is activated by the cultural assets our place, the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor presents.

As described below, the input received during our community engagement indicates great community need and desire for a high-quality school option for scholars in our target areas that focus on (1) post secondary preparation and planning and (2) reflects and affirms scholars' identities. Below outlines evidence that an adequate number of parents or legal guardians with students eligible to attend the proposed school pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-40-50 support the formation of the charter school, indicating interest documented by grade level for the first year of operation. As seen in **Appendix C-2 for the 2020-2021 Communication Log**, our outreach includes over 161 1:1 Meetings, with 27% of those meetings being with families with scholars eligible for Sea Islands Heritage Academy.

Our outreach includes over 429 events attended, participated in, or held; 32% of those events had families with scholars eligible for Sea Islands Heritage Academy. While nothing in the South Carolina Charter Law requires a charter school applicant to provide a list of prospective or tentatively enrolled students or prospective employees with the application, as pursuant to SC 59-40-60 Section (G). We have provided a table indicating parental interest documented by grade-level groupings appropriate for the targeted population for the first year of operation. Parent last names, directory information, and scholar names are masked to protect the identity of potential students. In summary, nearly 90% of families within our Target Community of Northern Beaufort County, <15% within Beaufort County, but out of our Target Community, and nearly 50% within our Priority Zone in Northern Beaufort County. Please see below for the percentage of interested families in year 1 by zip code, additionally, see **Appendix C-4** for the complete table.

Zip Code - % Interested Families

- 29902 7.98%
- 29906 14.11%

- 29907 17.18%
- 29910* 6.13%
- 29920 23.31%

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- 29926* 1.23%
- 29928* 1.23%
- 29934 0.61%
- 29935* 2.45%
- 29936* 3.68%
- 29940 18.40%
- 29941 4.29%
- 29945 1.23%

* Indicates zip codes outside of the Target Community (Northern Beaufort County)

Section I.1.2: COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

The community is the core of Sea Islands Heritage Academy's identity. Since our inception, we have fostered robust community engagement designed to reach all scholars in the community, thereby ensuring equal access. Beginning in July 2020, our Founding Team initiated dialogues with partners in the programmatic structure of Sea Islands Heritage Academy. Since then, we have engaged in direct recruitment with over 200 interested families, community leaders, and community members. With empathy interviews of community and organizational leaders (outlined in **Appendix C**), we found the need for a high-quality educational option that intersects historical relevance and academic excellence. Our proposed Executive Director called on the interviewees' networks to engage with the broader community, directly engaging with nearly 100 stakeholders before the first public Design Team Meeting in February 2021 (**Appendix C-2 Communication Log**). As such, the Founding Committee at Sea Islands Heritage Academy has worked alongside community members to co-design key features of the program described in this application. These features include but are not limited to: non-negotiable programmatic features, curriculum choices, key job descriptions and titles, facility expectations, and our school's name. Working alongside the community to design key elements allows for collective appreciation and investment.

Through our practice of co-design, often called participatory action research, we have conducted over 200 empathy interviews (via 1:1 meetings). We have led 9 months of open, public co-design meetings (via Design Team Meetings) that have allowed the community to lead input for the school's development and parts of the educational model. Have marketed unique features of our proposed education program through activities available for the community (Pilot Programs), see **Appendix C-2 for Full 2020-2021 Communication Log (Section I.1.4)**.

Alongside direct marketing, discussed above and elaborated upon below, we will continue to invite dialogues with interested families using social media, canvassing, mailers, and presence at community events. These include pop-up informational events, tabling opportunities at community events, and hosting school break camps featuring our non-negotiable elements.

1:1 Meetings: At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our community engagement began 2020 with 1:1 meetings. These 1:1 meetings served as spaces to host empathy interviews. As identified experts in community codesign, “Empathy interviews can help identify issues that need to be addressed by the system, unpack the root causes of a problem from a community perspective, and gather information

that inspires new, human-centered change ideas. Some people report that their interview practice is an

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intervention in and of itself since it provides a new structure for voices to be heard.”¹¹ From these interviews we found that the communities of St. Helena Island (29920) and Seabrook (29941) were primarily concerned with (1) students’ understanding of the historical importance of Beaufort County and (2) students’ exposure and preparation for life after high school, directly informing the need in which we seek to address at Sea Islands Heritage Academy (**Section I.1.5**). Outreach began in July 2020 to gather support for and input on the school’s design and to make families aware of the proposed charter school. As outlined in **Appendix C-2 for Full Communication Log**, stakeholder interactions included 1:1 meetings (including House Meetings), events participated, events attended, events held, and tabling.

Program Feature Pilots: Throughout our co-design process, Founding Committee members piloted features of our educational model alongside community organizations to garner real-time feedback on the model and to actively engage stakeholders.

- Through Costal Community Foundation’s generous grant around mediating distant learning gaps, Sea Islands Heritage Academy partnered with Extra Mile Club, a local community organization committed to empowering youth through mentorship, to hold a summer camp in 2020. In this 3-week program, Sea Islands Heritage Academy piloted restorative practices through a value based advisory system, as well as place-based education through Department of Natural Resources field trips. During this camp we found our structure and practices allowed for scholars to grow academically, as well as foster a sense of community with a proactive school culture.
- As a 4.0 Schools Fellow, a member of our Founding Committee hosted a pop-up event at a district middle school, aimed at understanding the connection between scholar engagement and personal connection. 4.0 is a national organization that invests in community-centered models of education by providing coaching, curriculum, community, and capital to organizations that envision more equitable ways to learn, and the desire to ethically test those ideas. Alongside a local community organization, who also attended Design Team Meetings, we crafted a three-day workshop around musical storytelling. From this workshop, we found one of our Grounding Beliefs, a principle of place-based education, to be true—you *must know who you are to know where you are going*. Through our pilot, we found that using a modality of engagement to connect middle school participants to Gullah Geechee heritage, scholars had more independent interest in learning more.

Because of the success of both pilots, they will continue in the upcoming year as strategies to engage and excite the community, with the Extra Mile Club’s partnership growing to a full extended day program, as well as hosting school break camps throughout Northern Beaufort County.

Design Team Meetings: The team at The Teachers Guild x School Retool, a national nonprofit dedicated to developing the capacity of school communities, has spent the last five years understanding the impacts of community co-designing schools. Applying the Guild’s best practices, Sea Islands Heritage Academy has been co-designed with the input of community members representing our students and families and sharing a keen understanding of community needs. Design Team Meetings created the unique opportunity to build parent and community demand for a proposed charter school. Ultimately, their vision, experience, and assets have decided educational elements of our programming at Sea Islands Heritage Academy (**Section I.1.5**). Although those who attend Design Team meetings are not

¹¹ NELSESTUEN, K., & Smith, J. (2021, September 24). EMPATHY INTERVIEWS. Learning Forward. Retrieved October 9, 2021, from <https://learningforward.org/>.

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necessarily on the Founding Committee, Design Team members’ deep investment in the process and proposed outcome remains our strongest form of marketing and recruitment (**Section I.1.2**). Truly, grassroots in nature, Sea Islands Heritage Academy, leverages the relationality inherent to the target communities to create a direct means of marketing and recruitment.

In their Case for Belief, the educators, experts, and community members involved in The Teachers Guild x School Retool’s study “found that no one practice, or methodology takes root on its own. Instead, the greatest results come from having the right foundation...[co-designing schools] take[s] into account the full human experience of a system (i.e., schools). We propose that building belief among the adults and young people in school communities is the single most important factor to catalyzing change at the most basic human level.”¹² Sea Islands Heritage Academy works directly with the target community to catalyze change.

The Teachers Guild x School Retool names the following five elements as building blocks to successful co-design. For Heritage Academy’s co-design we combine all five building blocks in the planning and execution of our Design Team Meetings to maximize outcomes and build a successful co-design model:

- Trust: Relationships drive transformation
- Belonging: Equity begins with each person being valued
- Resilience: Big change starts small
- Evidence: Proof leads to progress
- Collaboration: One plus one equals three

Additionally, using guidance from NewSchools Venture Fund’s Design Camp, we began Design Team Meetings in February 2021. For approximately nine months, community members— including parents, business owners, and other community members living and working throughout Northern Beaufort County—convened monthly to co-design the educational model of the Sea Islands Heritage Academy. Through our structured, iterative process, community members examined educational models, frameworks, and strategies, and created composite portraits of key stakeholders (scholars, family, and educators) aligned to our key design features. Below outlines the session progression followed in our Design Team Meetings:

Figure 17: Design Team Scope & Activities

Phase	Sessions	Topics Covered	Activities
Phase 1	February, March	Learning charters and our local educational Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local educational data analysis and discussion • Examining empowerment of charter schools • Review co-design process and discuss roles
Phase 2	April, May, June	Building stakeholder aim composites by aligning stakeholders’ (scholars, families,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and determine core values • Review graduate aim process and process to build stakeholder composites

		faculty) assets, priorities, and goals to our core	
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¹²The Teachers Guild x School Retool. “The Case for Belief: 5 Years of School Engagement, 5 Years of Building Blocks for Equitable School Change.” The Teachers Guild x School Retool, 2020

		values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify assets, priorities, and goals of each stakeholder • Name school
Phase 3	July, August, September	Curriculum analysis and aligning values to deeper learning capstone projects for scholars across all grades.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and determine grade-level core values and create aligned capstone projects • Determine curricular expectations • Review a variety of curricular and educational model
Phase 4	October	Iterative review of Heritage Academy’s Educational Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and reviewed non-negotiable elements of the charter application and gave feedback

We are **powered by community** through our co-design process. As such, we have already begun recruitment for the 2024 school year through active participation in Design Team Meetings. Furthering our co-design process, we will employ the following recruitment strategies to ensure full enrollment in fall 2024:

- **Community center and church events:** Sea Islands Heritage Academy has and will continue to partner with local organizations (identified in **Section I.1: Evidence of Need and Community support and Appendix C**) to present information sessions to and answer families’ questions. These nonprofit organizations and places of worship supports the effort to launch a diverse high achieving public school in Beaufort County.
- **House Informational Meeting:** Sea Islands Heritage Academy will conduct living room/house information sessions to share information about our educational philosophy, instructional model, and year-round calendar. Living room/house informational sessions will be organized through prospective parents (many of whom were on our Design Team) and their social networks. These events are smaller and more intimate, typically with 12-15 parents invited to a friend or neighbor’s house. The smaller format of these events will help build significant support for the school and allow parents to fully understand Sea Islands Heritage Academy’s school model and design and have any questions answered regarding the application and admissions process and timeline.
- **Canvassing door to door:** One of the most effective methods of meeting potential families is canvassing neighborhoods and speaking to parents and guardians in their neighborhoods and houses. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will hold at least 10 community canvassing weekends. During these weekends, Sea Islands Heritage Academy assembles Board members and a group of volunteers (likely Design Team Members) that support the school and go door to door in our targeted areas. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will ensure that a diverse set of neighborhoods are canvassed to ensure that Sea Islands Heritage Academy is providing information about enrollment to all eligible families. At least 65% of canvassing will focus on the target zip codes to ensure enrollment reflects that of the local school district in which the charter school is located.

- **Social media:** Sea Islands Heritage Academy will run social media channels targeting eligible families. Sea Islands Heritage Academy expects social media outreach to reach many families who may apply or have an interest in learning more about the school. Sea Islands Heritage Academy initiated an online presence in January 2021 and will continue to have a presence where families can find information about the school and sign up for updates. We currently have a combined 200 followers on our Instagram and Facebook.

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Section I.1.4 PLANNING AND SUSTAINING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

From the present to approval, the Design Team will continue to work alongside the Founding Committee to engage with families and the community. Our Design Team is composed mainly of parents and local educators– including business owners, attorneys, museum experts, cultural experts, artists, and more– that act as key players in spreading the reach of Sea Islands Heritage Academy’s mission. Hosting events, volunteering at tabling events, and canvassing the Design Team will work alongside the Founding Committee to ensure robust recruitment throughout Northern Beaufort County (**Section I.1.2**). Upon approval, members of the Design Team will be invited to join Sea Islands Heritage Academy’s Community Council. This council will have quarterly step-back meetings where key design elements will be analyzed for fidelity and efficacy (**Section I.1.4**). Furthermore, members of the Design Team have committed to supporting with outreach in the local community at locations frequented by families (supermarkets, festivals, etc.) various times to meet the needs of all families schedules. Ultimately, Sea Islands Heritage Academy is committed to serving the community; our gathering of their input does not end at charter approval but continues to deepen.

As articulated by community members in Phase 2 of our Design Team process, families are expected to (**Section I.1.4**):

- Be in partnership with Sea Islands Heritage Academy. Believe we are all on the same team for the family’s scholar’s success.
- Support whether in presence, participation, or action of our community-building events. • Work together with teachers and scholars to build scholars’ individualized learning plan and reinforce learning at home by reviewing grade-level newsletters.
- Work alongside educators to understand and reinforce restorative practices. • Accept and expect scholars will make mistakes, work alongside educators in right-making. Understand community standards and expectations and support their child’s compliance. • Work in partnership with educators to support scholar advocacy.
- Carefully read and respond to school correspondence (emails, mailed letters, texts, etc.). • Encourage and support a positive attitude towards the school and its programs.

During the life of Sea Islands Heritage Academy, family and community engagement will remain at its core, described in **Section I.2a**. Parent representation on our Board of Directors is required to ensure that our governance choices reflect the needs of our families, and all families will be encouraged to attend board meetings. Families will receive communication from a representative from the school at least twice a month, and families will be expected to come in to school to receive their scholar’s report card. In the case this is not possible, we will collaborate with the family to make arrangements, such as a home visit or virtual option. We work with all families to sustain a partnership that works to support each child. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we will staff a Community Advocate position, a role

dedicated to ensuring that our systems for communication and engagement are consistent, streamlined, inclusive, and clear (please reference **Appendix P Sample Job Descriptions**).

Section I.1.5 and Section I.1.3: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORT

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our mission is **to partner with community**. Since our inception, we

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have seen community assets underutilized. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we are committed to building and sustaining community partnerships and support throughout our life and our programming. Although programmatic partnerships have not been firmly established, in **Appendix C-3**, you will find letters of community support (**Section I.1.3**). These letters state why every individual or group believes the proposed new charter school would best serve the community. Upon approval, we will firmly secure all programmatic partnerships through memorandums of understanding by December 2023.

As community-centered partnerships are key to our model, evident in our school schedule (Appendix F) and the structure of our day (Section I.2.b), some organizations have committed to supporting our mission. The purpose of these partnerships will be integral to our Intersession programming, described in Section I.2 of our narrative. Some organizations will offer our scholars internships or deeper learning experiences during our Intersessions. The nature of the partnership will be contingent upon the organization. It will range from in-kind services to payment-based programming (our budget Appendix X, allots each scholar funding to subsidize any payment necessary). The organization will agree upon the scope of the services. It may include a semester-long residency, where scholars will engage with the partner organization during the semester and during Intersessions. Whereas other partner organizations will only engage with scholars directly during Intersessions. Upon approval, we will firmly secure all programmatic partnerships through memorandums of understanding by December 2023.

Organizations include arts-focused organizations, such as Responsible Artistry and the Gullah Kinfolk Theater; culturally focused organizations, such as Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor and the University of South Carolina at Beaufort (USCB); natural resource-focused organizations, such as the South Carolina Department Of Natural Resources ACE Basin NERR, Gullah Farmers Co-op, Earth People Farm, Marshview Farms, and Morning Glory Homestead; and civics-focused organizations such as Conservation Voters of South Carolina and several local delegate offices. Many of these organizations and individuals have been consistently involved in developing Sea Islands Heritage Academy's programming by participating in Design Team Meetings and pilot programming.

2a. Instructional Model

Section I.2a.1: NON-NEGOTIABLE ELEMENTS

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our mission is to **partner with the community to provide a 6th 12th grade educational experience that empowers and prepares all scholars to recognize the fullness of their identities to determine, pursue, and succeed in the future of their choice**. In alignment with our mission, we believe everything we do must be rooted in Gullah Geechee heritage to meet and exceed South Carolina's academic performance standards and allow for increased scholar achievement in all groups. As such, certain characteristics of our school model are non negotiable. These non-negotiable elements are derived from our four **Grounding Beliefs** and are necessary elements to make our beliefs true. These non-negotiable elements are (**Section I.2a.1**):

1. Personalized Learning
2. Placed-Based Instruction
3. Proactive School Culture
4. Powered by Community

In holding to these elements, our vision is to cultivate scholars' minds, hearts, and hands so that our scholars become knowledgeable and confident drivers of local and global change. These non-

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negotiable elements ensure success for our anticipated scholars and will guide our educational programming to increase scholar achievement in alignment with our mission. Though schools incorporating individual components of our non-negotiable elements exist; at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, there is no other option available to our students combines these four elements in a similar way, making our model unique. Sea Islands Heritage Academy is an innovative option. Each element has been carefully designed to meet diverse set students' needs while affirming and honoring the assets our community presents.

Non-Negotiable Element #1: Personalized Learning

We believe you must know who you are to know where you are going:

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, **we empower and prepare all scholars to recognize the fullness of their identities** by providing Individualized Learning Plans as well as an open-concept multiage classroom model. This personalized approach to learning prioritizes differentiated, small-group instruction to impact student achievement. With Individualized Learning Plans, scholars are empowered to set academic goals, reflect, and monitor alongside a trusted adult. Ultimately, fidelity to this element will ensure scholars know where they are academically and plan intentionally to make progress towards a defined set of meaningful goals.

- **Individualized Learning Plans**: Considering the Educational Landscape described in **Section I.1: Evidence of Need and Community Support**, at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we recognize the need for individual goal setting and planning to increase academic achievement. Working in tandem with other school-wide systems (House System Described in Non-Negotiable Element #3), our Individualized Learning Plans put scholars in the driver's seat of their knowledge and social-emotional development. With support from our House Leaders, scholars begin building the habit of goal-setting integral for long-term success. Using data from our universal screeners, formative practices, summative assessments, and anecdotal data, each scholar will have an Individualized Learning Plan that identifies milestones and skills on which the scholar should focus. These skills will be pulled from our Learning Management System, Schoology. Both professional development and implementation of this learning management solution are reflected in our budget in **Appendix X: 5 Year Budget**.

Our daily schedule, described in **Section I.2b: Educational Structure**, allows for structured, consistent time, with a consistent adult for scholars to set goals alongside academic standards, called House Meetings. During this daily block, scholars will receive 1:1 academic coaching and conferencing necessary for improved academic achievement. Springpoint's recent study on the impact of academic conferences finds:

A key practice that can effectively anchor a primary person system [, similar to Sea Islands Heritage Academy's House System, to] ... create pathways to educational success for all students is academic conferencing. Academic conferencing is a structured approach to student support that focuses on

guiding students to set and achieve academic goals and become independent learners. The consistent application of this practice is reflective of an intentional and embedded positive youth development approach and deeply connected to racial equity. When schools consistently recognize and develop student strengths and support meaningful goal attainment, they are more likely to ignite student

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interest, motivate independent learners, and empower all young people to experience academic success.¹³

As mentioned above, pairing a primary person system with a consistent, goal-setting tool, Individualized Learning Plans, creates optimal conditions for increased student learning and achievement.

As a part of our commitment to family engagement, Individualized Learning Plans will be utilized in the following ways:

- Formally monitored through quarterly at Report Card Conferences
- Biweekly, House Leader informally updating families on scholar progress
- Weekly scholar check ins with his or her House Leader

These plans allow scholars to constantly reflect on their progression and create opportunities for family agency in their scholars' academics. The constant cycle of analysis, goal-setting, and reflection—in partnership with families—creates the conditions by which scholars' perceptions towards learning are positive and scholar achievement occurs.¹⁴

- Open-concept multiage classroom: Considering the variety of needs of scholars entering Sea Islands Heritage Academy, described in **Section I.1: Evidence of Need and Community Support**, we have opted to leverage the flexibility and personalization that comes from an open-concept, multiage Montessori classroom. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, learners will receive direct instruction primarily through small group instruction. With between 50-60 scholars and 4 staff members in the classroom space, scholars at Sea Islands Heritage Academy will learn through 2 hour 35 minute learning blocks (please see **Appendix F: Daily Schedule**). During these learning blocks, scholars will have the opportunity to receive differentiated instruction in small groups (e.g., no larger than 12). As described in **Section I.2d: Professional Development** educators will be allotted time to analyze data and create homogenous or heterogenous groupings that best fit the needs of scholars. These flexible and dynamic groupings will be driven by data and seen throughout Sea Islands Heritage Academy's middle and high school programming.

As described by the United States Department of Education, differentiated instruction refers to instruction paced to scholars' specific needs. Learning goals are the same for all students, but individuals can progress through the material at different speeds according to their learning needs. With the wide variety of learner needs at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, this open-concept multiage classroom model will target scholars' personalized needs while attending to grade-level standards. This instructional practice supports rapid student achievement. A 2019 study on the effect of differentiated, guided math instruction on student achievement and engagement found that students engaged in differentiated instruction are more active because they are presented with challenging concepts when they are ready. The learning is purposeful because it focuses on meeting individual needs¹⁵ At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we have utilized peer-reviewed research to ensure that we increase not only student achievement on state standards and close curriculum gaps but also our model-focused goals listed in **Section I.4: Goals, Objectives, and Assessment Plan**.

¹³Supporting every student: Academic conferencing in high school. (n.d.). Retrieved November 13, 2021, from

<https://www.springpointschools.org/media/2021/10/Academic-Conferencing-Springpoint.pdf>.¹⁴

Reflection fosters deep learning: The 'reflection ... - eric. (n.d.). Retrieved October 10, 2021, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1178730.pdf>.

¹⁵Norton, K. (2019). The effect of differentiated, guided math instruction on student achievement and student engagement. Dissertations, Theses, and Projects, 216. Retrieved from <https://red.mnstate.edu/thesis/216>

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Furthermore, in grades 9-12 we will apply to use Summit Learning Platform (SLP) as our curriculum. This curriculum, described in detail in **Section I.2a: Curriculum and Instructional Choices**, uses technology to support each student in owning their personal learning path and connects the classroom to the real world. With the platform, teachers have complete access to see how their students perform and use that data to personalize instruction and provide additional support through mentoring and coaching.

Throughout a scholars' time at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our **personalized learning** non negotiable develops as scholars do through our enabling systems of Individualized Learning Plans, the house System structure, and multi-age classrooms. All of which support in establishing long-term habits to support future success and aligning with our mission.

Non-Negotiable Element #2: Placed Based Educational Framework

We believe that every scholar should love learning and be challenged by its rigor.

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, learning happens when people are challenged and enjoying the challenging content. Our instruction planning rests on the understanding that learning occurs when scholars are in the area between their prior knowledge and new knowledge or skills, also known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).¹⁶ As such, educators will be developed to understand scholars' ZPDs and engage scholars through their assets. To achieve the deep engagement necessary to access scholars' ZPDs, our educators leverage a Place-Based Educational (PBE) Framework. Described in detail in **Section I.2a: Curricular and Instructional Choices**, PBE offers a localized context by which scholars can understand rigorous content. Through our commitment to data and challenge, educators work strategically to ensure academic, standard-aligned excellence. This commitment creates the conditions by which **all scholars are prepared to determine and pursue the future of their choice.**

- **Integrated, Rigorous Place-Based Learning:** Place-Based Education (PBE) is a high-impact, deep learning approach that leverages the community as a classroom. The deep learning, high-impact approach is tied to deep student engagement. High student engagement creates the conditions by which students are deeply invested in learning and meeting or exceeding the standards outlined by the South Carolina Board of Education. GETTING SMART's research on PBE defines Place-Based Education as "an approach to learning that takes advantage of geography to create authentic, meaningful, and engaging, personalized learning for students." Our scholars will see themselves and their community in all aspects of school and its academic coursework. Our educators use PBE as the framework by which content is planned and executed. This framework will support educators as they deliver the peer-reviewed, standard-aligned curriculum. As described in **Section I.2a: Curricular and Instructional Choices** below, *place* becomes the lens by which educators internalize, creating truly local, student-centered learning. Considering the wealth of cultural and historical relevance of our intended location, as described in **Section 1.1: Evidence of Need and Community Support**, PBE creates a unique opportunity to allow the place and scholars' understanding of the place to drive academic results.

Non-Negotiable Element #3: Proactive School Culture

We believe that families are our most important partners to scholar success.

To support scholars in **recognizing the fullness of their identities**, we honor the gifts the Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor provided and, most importantly, our families. Every community member at Sea Islands Heritage Academy will be expected to take an asset-based approach to family engagement. Families are the experts on our scholars, and through consistent, honest partnership, our scholars can achieve maximum success. We believe that partnership must be intentionally planned in our systems and structures and have done so throughout our initial community engagement seen in **Section I.1: Evidence of Community Need and Support**.

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, many of our structures and systems described below and in **Section I.2b: Educational Structure** are inspired by Montessori philosophy around adolescent development. This philosophical inspiration speaks to the necessity of whole-child education, a philosophy seen throughout our proactive school culture non-negotiable element. As many Montessori schools are pre-schools serving three- to six-year-old children, many people are unaware that Montessori spoke and wrote about middle-level education before her death in 1952. She shared:

If puberty is on the physical side a transition from an infantile to an adult state, there is also, on the psychological side, a transition from the child who has to live in a family, to the man who has to live in society. These two needs of the adolescent: for protection during the time of the difficult physical transition, and for an understanding of the society which he is about to enter to play his part as a man. (Montessori, 1973 [1948]), p. 60)¹⁷

The systems described throughout our charter application are grounded in this dual scholars' needs as described above-- an understanding of the society which he or she is about to enter to play his part as a man. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our **proactive school culture** creates the conditions, supports, and accompanying systems to support adolescent growth.

- **House System & Family Engagement**: Family creates a connection to people, perspectives, and assets across lines of time and space. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we value the importance of family in improving scholar achievement. Plainly, family engagement is a significant key to scholar success. In honoring Gullah Geechee beliefs around family kinship relationships, we will have a House system where each scholar is provided a primary person, a House Leader. This House Leader will deliver social emotional curricular content (described in **Section II.6: Student Right and Conduct**), monitor Individual Learning Plans, and loop up with scholars as they progress academically. House Leaders are assigned to scholars in 6th (or upon enrollment), and their House Leader will serve as an advisor for grades 6, 7, and 8; resetting in grade 9, where scholars will retain the same House Leader from grades 9-12. Each House Leader will be the primary person for no more than 15 students, allowing meaningful relationships to develop. Our House System both honors the place-based Gullah Geechee heritage, as well as creates a consistent structure that ensures that *families are our most important partners to scholar success*.

The educational benefits of our primary person House System are illustrated in the research

presented in Non-Negotiable Element #1. Through our House system, our scholars will have

¹⁷ Montessori, Maria, 1870-1952. *From Childhood to Adolescence; Including Erdkinder and The Function of the University*. New York : Schocken Books, 1973.

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consistent support from a single staff member responsible for biweekly family communication, delivering SEL content, hosting weekly scholar check-ins, and preparing and communicating Individualized Learning Plans. Fidelity to this element, through our House System, creates the conditions for improved student learning. The Teachers Guild x School Retool has found "relational trust among adults is essential for effective school improvement. School communities with high relational trust are home to, among other things, more experimentation, better decision-making, and improved student learning." Research has shown that a structured, consistent family engagement system positively impacts scholars' perception of learning and overall academic achievement.¹⁸ At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our House System not only creates the conditions by which scholars can be successful, but we also work strategically to maintain trusting, consistent family engagement.

Non-Negotiable Element #4: Powered by Community:

We believe in the strength of heritage to empower a community. We believe that the land is our legacy, and we have the right to sustain economically from it.

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we consistently honor the legacy of self-determination and self-actualization embedded in the history of the local Gullah Geechee community. According to the National Park Service's Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study, "At the foundation of Gullah/Geechee cultural identity are African-influenced values and principles such as belief in ... communal rather than individual identity, honoring the continuity of life by respecting kinship bonds and ancestors, respect for nature, respect and honor toward elders, and respect for the destiny of the soul" (Parks 2003). Aligned with our mission, we commit to building and sustaining partnerships (identified in **Section I.1: Evidence of Community Need and Support**) to enhance and inform scholars' understanding of self within the community. We believe that building an understanding of self within the community allows scholars to find their purpose in the world. Studies show that people with a strong sense of purpose tend to live lives characterized by more significant health, happiness, and success¹⁹. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, these actions will ultimately **empower and prepare all scholars to recognize the fullness of their identities** and align that with their college and career choices.

- **Community Engaged Intersessions (Yearlong Calendar):** Sea Islands Heritage Academy will operate from a year-round calendar with four roughly 9-week quarters and two periods of required Intersession throughout the school year (see **Appendix F**). Our year-round calendar provides multiple opportunities for scholars to apply their learning through thematic internship experiences. A 2020 study²⁰ found that these experiences are "often...valuable for the students as they are afforded a new lens through which they can evaluate their chosen field of study, while also determining the pros/cons of the industry and the specific organizational culture of their chosen site." Beginning these opportunities earlier in scholars' educational careers positions scholars to make informed choices about their future. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy these experiences will be an extension of the "Community Engagement" portion of the day, seen in the aforementioned **Appendix F**. Community organizations will lead this time in the day with support

¹⁸ Hall, Christina M. (2020) "The Impact of Family Engagement on Student Achievement," *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*: Vol. 22: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1327> ¹⁹ Damon, W. (2008). *The path to purpose: Helping our children find their calling in life*. New York, NY: Free Press.

given to the University of South Carolina at Beaufort (USCB) students as part of their Public Health Program's experiential learning. **Appendix C-3 Letters of Support** indicated organizations that have committed to being part of our Community Engagement portion of the day and intersessions; as well as USCB's commitment to intern-led support.

In our iterative co-design process, community members identified four categories students should explore to fully understand the gifts of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor: Arts, Natural Resources, History, and Civics. During Intersession, scholars will be allowed to explore careers and experiences in these categories. Through our partnerships with organizations like the Department of Natural Resources and the Gullah Geechee Chambers of Commerce, Sea Islands Heritage Academy ensures that scholars' learning is organized so that they can explore all parts of their local community. In "All-Day, All-Year Schools," Ruy Teixeira showed that when year-round education is accompanied by enrichment and remedial programs and other extensions of the year, achievement effects tend to be positive. Moreover, similar studies have shown that a year-round academic calendar positively impacts student achievement in under resourced communities. Our year-round calendar allows our scholars to apply their learnings and explore career pathways that may interest them.

John Dewey, a leader of the progressive and innovative movement in education in the United States, once said, "We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience." In the spirit of Dewey, all learning during Sea Islands Heritage Academy's Intersession will be linked and reflected upon through a grade-specific thematic question, offering a contextualized understanding of the experience. For example, three scholars in Ms. Reyes' 8th grade class may have very different Intersession experiences—Jayden, working alongside a soil engineer; Liz, supporting a local nonprofit in policy efforts; and Kate may be learning basket weaving with a local artist—however, all their learning will be through the grade-wide value of Equity (see **Appendix G 1 : Core Value Matrix**). As such, all three scholars will be asked the following question to reflect and present on their experience: *How did the Intersession you experienced help you understand systems and solutions for equity?* Embedding metacognition practices and integrative thinking into these experiences, Intersessions will link scholars' practical knowledge to academic students' coursework and identity development.

Section I.2a.2: RESEARCH-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

(Instructional Choice) Place-Based Learning

As described above, Place-Based Education (PBE) offers an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to education. In David Sobel's 2004 book, *Place-based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities*, he describes PBE as:

Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, [PBE] helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environment quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school. (Sobel 2004)

PBE is particularly impactful in rural communities. Because of its focus on place and practical learning, scholars in tight-knit, rural communities often find deep purpose when instructional choices are tied to the local community.²¹ At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we have identified rural, vulnerable population centers as our Priority Zones in Northern Beaufort County (described in **Section I.1: Evidence of Need and Community Support**) most in need of innovative approaches. PBE provides an innovative approach to yield increased student achievement. To ensure the fidelity of success of our scholars, at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, a set of PBE design principles guide mindsets around instruction:

- **Local to Global Context:** Local learning serves as a model for understanding global challenges, opportunities, and connections.
- **Learner-Centered:** Learning is personally relevant to students and enables student agency.
- **Inquiry-Based:** Learning is grounded in observing, asking relevant questions, making predictions, and collecting data to understand the economic, ecological, and socio-political world.
- **Design Thinking:** Design thinking provides a systematic approach for students to make meaningful impact in communities through the curriculum.
- **Community as Classroom:** Communities serve as learning ecosystems for schools where local and regional experts, experiences and places are part of the expanded definition of a classroom.
- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** The curriculum matches the real world where the traditional subject area content, skills, and dispositions are taught through an integrated, interdisciplinary, and frequently project-based approach where all learners are accountable and challenged.²²

Employing these principles encourages high student engagement and deep learning. Scholars at Sea Islands Heritage Academy will explore rigorous content through a localized lens. A 2014 study by the American Institute for Research found that students engaged in the deep learning practices were more likely to enroll in college, as well as reported higher levels of collaboration skills, academic engagement, motivation to learn, and self-efficacy.²⁶ Intending to serve a historically under resourced community, Sea Islands Heritage Academy's focus on deep engagement and learning practices positions scholars with the skills to **determine, pursue, and succeed in the future of their choice**.

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we believe a Place-Based model, naming the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor as the place, will improve academic outcomes for all scholars, not only scholars of Gullah Geechee descent. To illustrate how our implementation of PBE will positively impact all student achievement, a study done at Humboldt State University (HSU), found by integrating the local heritage into the curricular approach, students had a positive sense of academic belonging and positive academic growth.²³ Because HSU is located on the ancestral land of the Wiyot people and the university services nine federally recognized American Indian tribes, HSU centered Native American culture, traditional ways of knowing, and contemporary issues faced by tribal communities in their place-based curriculum. Similarly, at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we will center Gullah Geechee principles and beliefs in our place-based approach. In doing so, we believe we will have a similar impact on all scholars as HSU's centering Wiyot heritage.

²¹Hall, Christina M. (2020) "The Impact of Family Engagement on Student Achievement," *Networks: An Online*

Journal for Teacher Research: Vol. 22: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1327> ²² What is place-based education and why does it matter? (n.d.). Retrieved January 24, 2022, from <https://www.gettingsmart.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/What-is-Place-Based-Education-and-Why-Does-it-Matter-3.pdf>

Place-Based Education has been shown to positively impact the achievement of all students—indigenous or otherwise. In a 2003 ³⁸, a study found indigenous and non-indigenous students showed significant growth when academic content was contextualized in local indigenous heritage. PBE, in essence, creates a curb cut effect, the idea that an investment in one group can cascade out and up and be a substantial investment to the broader community's well-being. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, investing in localizing and contextualizing education in Gullah Geechee principles and beliefs will result in a greater sense of self and deeper learning in *all* scholars by meeting or exceeding South Carolina State Standards (**Section I.2a.3**).

Section I.2a.3: CURRICULUM TO MEET OR EXCEED STATE STANDARDS

All curricular choices in Sea Islands Heritage Academy educational program are research-based and data-driven. Each component (described below) was carefully selected to meet the needs of the target student population. Each curricular choice described below, though nationally vetted, has standards crosswalks that support South Carolina State Standards in alignment with the academic standards adopted by the State Board of Education.

(Curriculum Choice) American Reading Company Core - ELA

Considering a <20% average proficiency rate on SCReady in ELA of students in our target communities (refer to Section I.1: Evidence of Need and Community Support), curricular choices are of the utmost importance at Sea Islands Heritage Academy. To support the development of strong foundational literacy skills, we have chosen to use American Reading Company's (ARC) Core Curriculum as the basis for our literacy curriculum. ARC Core is highly acclaimed, with an "All Green" on EdReports, it has also qualified for a "Strong" rating on Evidence for ESSA. In its overview of both the 6-8 and 9-12 curricula, EdReports shares:

The instructional materials reviewed meet expectations for alignment and usability in all grades. Lessons and tasks are centered around high-quality texts. Texts provided with the materials are at the appropriate grade level text complexity and are accompanied by quality tasks aligned to the standards of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in service to grow literacy skills. Materials build knowledge and skills through integrated reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language. The instructional materials meet expectations for use and design, teacher planning, learning of the standards for students and professional learning support for teachers. Standards aligned assessment, differentiated instruction, and support for learners are accounted for within the materials. Suggestions for technology use are present. Overall, the materials attend to alignment to the standards and to structural supports and usability.

ARC's inquiry-based curriculum challenges scholars to dive deep into the content of their choice and arms educators with tools to understand, support, and grow scholars' literacy skills. Across the country, schools that implement ARC Core with fidelity see tremendous growth in scholar success. ARC's website shares a wealth of case studies on their impact. We found two particularly notable at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, given that these schools serve a similar population.

Mineral Springs Middle School in Winston-Salem, NC introduced ARC Core from American Reading Company to their school in the 2017-2018 school year. Gaining 7.3% in ELA proficiency as a class

between sixth and eighth grade, strong improvements were made by traditionally underserved

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students: Black students gained 18.7%, Hispanic students gained 4%, and economically disadvantaged students gained 8.2%.

Fourth-Grade Scores at Petree Elementary School Rose by 10.8% in Year One of ARC Core Implementation. The partnership between Petree and American Reading Company, focused on a love of reading and rigorous, engaging materials for all students, resulted in solid gains for English Learners (up 24.1%) and Hispanic students (up 15.9%).

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we anticipate serving some traditionally underserved scholars. As such, the choice of ARC Core Curriculum for literacy is directly connected to its proven impact on historically underserved scholars. ARC Core's focus on research choice and tool consistency moves scholars to meet and exceed proficiency.

ARC's yearly scope and sequences, cross-walked with South Carolina state standards mentioned above, are broken into knowledge-building units inclusive of research-focused reading and writing, culminating in a final project (see **Appendix G -2**). A Unit of Study focuses the entire class on researching and building expertise on specific content or genre. A carefully defined research focus and a set of Research Questions scaffold student research while providing the content architecture for the Unit. These questions align with key concepts in the content of the Unit, ensuring all students learn the grade-level content required of South Carolina State Standards, while allowing educators to take a multigrade approach. Throughout each Unit of Study, scholars are equipped with high-interest texts at their Independent Reading Levels. With the support of graphic organizers and tools that focus on the theme's key concepts, scholars learn to inquire. Every day is designed to support student agency as scholars take ownership of their learning. This reflects our belief that every scholar should love learning and be challenged by its rigor.

ARC Core provides four 9-week units per grade, aligned with our year-round calendar (see **Appendix F**). All Units of Study are available in Spanish, offering a differentiated level of instruction for English Language Learners. Strategies found in these flexible pathways allow scholars to both develop language practice and obtain deep contextual knowledge for students who are requiring English Language Learner services (Section I.2a.4.iv). Each Unit of Study spans a grade band, and instructional materials spiral South Carolina's State Standards throughout the grade band. With leveled libraries and questions aligned to the specific grade level, teachers are better prepared to support personalized learning through small-group instruction. With each Unit of Study, teachers receive a new set of topically aligned instructional materials and texts to use with each 9-week unit, but the structures and practices that guide instructional delivery are consistent throughout the year. **Appendix G-3** overviews a yearly Scope and Sequence with alignment to Common Core Standards; Sea Islands Heritage Academy has confirmed with the provider that they are able to compile a South Carolina State Standard crosswalk in English to ensure state standards are met. **Appendix G-4** overviews a daily lesson. Its consistent structure, grades K-12, allows for the flexibility necessary to support Sea Islands Heritage Academy's educational programming.

The first Unit of Study, Literacy Lab, is consistent at all grade levels. In this unit, scholars learn the structural practices, routines, and procedures used throughout the 6-8 and 9-12 grade bands. The goal of Literacy Lab is for scholars to build a love of reading with a community of peers who read and talk about books together and a teacher who believes in them and helps them develop both reading passions and reading skills.

In the first Literacy Lab and the three subsequent Units of Study, scholars select fiction and nonfiction books from thousands of leveled titles at their developmentally appropriate independent reading levels, which they can read at school and home. Teachers then introduce daily Readers' Workshops in small groups to connect classroom instruction and conduct one-on-one conferences with students, focusing on issues such as book selection and reading comprehension. Instructional materials are designed to ensure assessment of independent reading while also training teachers and administrators on how to assess, identify and monitor student reading progress. As described in Section 2d: Professional Development, teachers take part in training where they are introduced to the reading materials and work side by side with American Reading Company coaches to enhance their knowledge of reading instruction. Teachers are trained to provide explicit instruction to remove blockers to a student's rapid movement toward grade-level reading proficiency and the classroom management skills needed for small group and one-to-one instruction.

Not only does ARC's leveled libraries support our non-negotiable element of personalized learning, but ARC Core reflects Sea Islands Heritage Academy's core belief you must **know who you are to know where you are going**. ARC published the following in reference to their leveled libraries:

Every student will find him-/herself and his/her family represented in each of the baskets of books, to the extent they are available from American publishers. ARC regularly provides classroom libraries for reservation schools, the American Legacy Magazine African American History Mobile Truck Exhibit, Alma Flor Ada Latino Heritage Collections, Core Knowledge Curriculum Supplementary Collections, and Expeditionary Learning Core Materials, as well as text sets and classroom libraries for hundreds of districts of every kind across the country.

American Reading Company goes to great lengths to reflect multiple perspectives in all of our text sets. To the extent possible, each Social Studies collection emphasizes the experiences of all African Americans, Asian Americans, North American Indians, and Latinos, as well as people of all classes.

Through small group instructional rotations, scholars will receive direct instruction, explore leveled independent texts, and write or discuss to synthesize their learning. As explained in Section 2b: Educational Structure, these rotations allow scholars to work collaboratively or independently to understand the content deeply.

Highly rated in its usability, ARC Core provides educators with standard alignment questioning, strategies, and some scripting. That said, educators will be responsible for and developed in internalizing the unit's curriculum through a Place-Based lens. This will require educators to think about content through the following internalization questions. As educators practice learner-centered instruction, unit planning questions ask educators to take the role of the learner (scholar):

- Assessment: How will I show what I've learned? What accountability do I have to illustrate my learning? How does my learning intersect skill, knowledge, and place?
- Text: What am I learning? How does it reflect who I am?
- Task: How does the way I am learning reflect myself, my heritage, and my community?

This will be particularly helpful in supporting the foundational gaps scholars in our target areas may have. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our choice of internalizing ARC's Core curriculum through a PBE lens highlights our commitment to purposeful, academic improvement and excellence.

(Curriculum Choice) – Mid School Math: Mathematics

Our core curriculum for building numeracy and mathematics skill will be Core Curriculum by MidSchoolMath. As a curriculum, MidSchoolMath Core is highly acclaimed, with a “All Green” on EdReports, one of few middle school math curriculum to do so. It has also qualified for a “Strong” rating on Evidence for ESSA. In its overview of both the 5-8, EdReports shares, “The materials reviewed for Core Curriculum by MidSchoolMath Grades 5-8 meet expectations for focus as they assess grade level content and provide all students extensive work with grade-level problems to meet the full intent of grade-level standards.

According to its website, MidSchoolMath utilizes all five pedagogical approaches determined to be essential for effective teaching and learning: Piagetian methods, distributed practice, adaptive technologies, immediate feedback, and the testing effect. Properly utilized, all have shown effect sizes that translate to more than 1.8 years of growth compared to a year of learning math in a traditional approach. MidSchoolMath’s variety of modalities alongside tried-and-true practices makes it the right chosen curriculum for our anticipated scholar population. The adaptive technology, real life, gamified approaches, and cross-walked alignment from The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) standards to South Carolina state standards creates the conditions for scholars at Sea Islands Heritage Academy to meet or exceed the academic performance standards and expectations. Furthermore, the variety of pedagogical approaches deeply supports Sea Islands Heritage Academy’s vision of personalized learning through small-group instruction. The combination of techniques and the spiraled, grade-level content complement our open-concept, multi-age classroom approach. Similarly to ARC Core, MidSchoolMath’s level of flexibility makes it the right choice for Sea Islands Heritage Academy.

One key component of MidSchoolMath that pairs well with our Place-Based Education is its Math Simulator. With the support of the National Science Foundation, MidSchoolMath developed The Math Simulator™, which has extraordinary learning effects on randomized controlled trials. Data shows that both low and high-performing students show equivalent achievement gains. Two trials conducted by National Science Foundation showed that against baseline performance, a student at the 50th percentile would move to the 88th-89th, further solidifying the expected results using MidSchoolMath Core Curriculum with The Math Simulator. According to their website, The Math Simulator™ is truly a significant breakthrough in online math curriculum and resources in three distinct ways:

The simulations provide situations where student input is directly linked to functional output. It is this central and unique mechanism in The Math Simulator™ that truly drives student achievement: students directly experience how the math actually works while having the opportunity to fail in a safe environment.

The simulations provide a rich context where the math is meaningful, and embedded in a memorable, relatable story-based concept. This advances how a math standard can be genuinely conceptualized.

The simulations helped teachers break the traditional, yet not effective, “stand and deliver” classroom protocol, by removing information (data) and allowing students to determine, on their own, what variables are necessary to solve the problem. This shift in pedagogy is essential to supporting mathematical thinking. By removing the propensity of giving too much information, and encouraging the teacher to pose a natural question, students can focus on the understanding of (1) how the math functions and (2) the concept of the math standard.

Drawing upon evidence-based protocols to support learning, rather than relying on traditional lectures, MidSchoolMath not only scholars in its instruction but educators in its usability. The content domains are consistent across grade levels, which allows Sea Islands Heritage Academy educators to support all their scholars' needs through coherent vertical alignment. The ease of data-driven instruction and proven scholar achievement make MidSchoolMath the right curricular choice for Sea Islands Heritage Academy.

(Curriculum Choice) Integrated Science and Social Studies

While no single science or social studies curriculum provides a cohesive and sequential curriculum aligned to SC state science and social studies standards, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will develop an integrated scope and sequence that aligns project based framework to South Carolina learning standards. The Academic Leadership Team (ALT), comprised of the Principal (Executive Director in earlier years) and content leads (stipend classroom educators) will construct the integrated scope and sequences that align all standards and key assessments. As illustrated in **Appendix Q: Detailed Start Up Plan**, we will formally convene our Curriculum Implementation Team (CIT) immediately after authorization. Our Middle School Social Studies and Science curriculum will be developed during our planning year, led by the CIT. This group, consisting of local educators, prospective Governing Board members, the prospective school leader, and organizational partners (SCDNR, Morning Glory Homestead, USCB Reconstruction Institute, and The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor NHA) will use a project-based framework, see **Appendix G -5**, to ensure South Carolina State Standards are met.

In alignment with our belief in the strength of community assets, activities to develop this curriculum (outline seen in **Appendix G-6, Figure 18**) will include stakeholder meetings and focus groups with community members and cultural leaders. By incorporating stakeholder perspectives and focus group storytelling into the curriculum, as well as including cultural leaders as instructors, students will understand regional cultural identity better and establish a stronger sense of place. As discussed in this narrative, this type of immersive learning in a group setting will build cohesion within scholars and extend to their outside-of-school interactions in the community. Students will also feel comfortable sharing their experiences through relevant projects. In combining vetted practices with place-based curricula and projects, scholars will walk away with an acknowledgment that all types of knowledge are imperative in enhancing community resilience.

Considering our multiage classroom model, scholars Social Studies and Science content will be on a three-year rotation, with content to meet specific grades level means. Below is an outline for the three year rotation; this will allow for scholars in 6-8 to meet all grade-level standards by the time they exit the middle school.

- Year 1: Environmental Literacy (Earth Science); The Story of We (American History/ SC History) •
- Year 2: Mind, Body, and Wellness (Life Science); How We Began (Ancient History) • Year 3:
- Movement and Cycles (Physical Science); The Now (Current Events/ SC History)

We intend to use the Summit Learning Platform, described further in our narrative, to support high school scholars. However, if need be (i.e., we are not selected to participate in SLP) a similar system will be constructed for grades 9-12. If need be, 9-12th grade curriculum development will begin during Year 1 of operation.

CIT will be responsible for expanding Appendix G-5 to include grade-level assessments for each quarter, pulled from open-sourced materials, and grade-level specific projects for each quarter. Over time, we intend for classroom educators to add to the bevy of project options and create more opportunities for student choice. Using the expansive and real-world knowledge from community assets, SCDNR and USCB, our Social Studies and Science curricula will be robust in content and application. The inherent relevance will amplify our core belief scholars should love learning and be challenged by its rigor. Commitments from both organizations to support our curricular design can be seen in **Appendix C-3 Letter of Support**.

Appendix G-6, Figure 18 outlines our Year 1 rotation, Environment Literacy. Through the year of study, scholars will learn the principles of Earth Science as it relates to scholars’ local environment. By way of usability, the Learning Objectives will be developed into projects that include a lesson-by-lesson content breakdown. Further discussed in Section 2d: Professional Development, educators will have ample time, between prep blocks and Internalization Meetings, to deeply understand the content and deliver grade-level specific materials. Using this outline, CIT will develop projects using **Appendix G-5: Teacher Guide**.

Figure 18: Environmental Literacy Outline, Y1 Rotation

Timeline	Topic	Essential Questions	Learning Objectives
Q1(July Sep)	Human and Natural System Interaction	<p>How do disproportionately distributed vulnerabilities impact human systems?</p> <p>How do disproportionately distributed vulnerabilities impact natural systems?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding how scientific, social, cultural, historical, and economic factors contribute to human and natural systems. • Identify and explain how local natural systems have evolved over years. • Examine interactions with human and natural systems. • Analyze the current research on the local salt marsh ecosystem and climate change impacts. • Work alongside partner organization to hypothesize the relationship and begin to identify a problem
Q2(Oct Dec)	Cultural and Scientific Antecedents	<p>How does extreme weather and climate change contribute to community health, social cohesion, and socio-economic equity?</p> <p>How do scientific, social, cultural, historical, and economic factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand health, social cohesion, and socio-economic equity. • Examine how local community impacts health, social cohesion, and socio economic equity. • Use US Climate Resilience Toolkit to investigate case studies of impact and solutions used to address extreme weather and climate change in ways that contribute to community health, social cohesion, and socio-economic equity. • Examine how use of NOAA assets can be

		impact climate	used to support community resilience
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		change?	
Q3(Jan Mar)	Civic Action and Community Resilience	What civic structures exist to promote resiliency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with ACE Basin NERR to investigate research being done on nature-based resilience options. • Examine Beaufort County sea-level rise report and communicate with local planners on resilience
Q4(Apr May)	Community based resiliency projects	How am I responsible as an individual citizen for supporting community resilience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects will include participation in From Seeds to Shoreline salt marsh restoration project, conducting community science King Tides Project to identify flood prone areas

In high school, Our project-based framework will be supported in high school through Summit Learning Platform. The self-directed, virtual nature of Summit Learning Platform (SLP) provides a natural progression to our middle school content. As described in detail below in **Section I.2a.6**, SLP is an online platform that requires teacher support in direct instruction and remediation. Thus SLP is a strong choice in creating personalized learning pathways and supporting the flexibility necessary. SLP offers a wide variety of standard-aligned courses in all contents. In history and science courses, projects similar to those in our 6-8 curriculum support teacher facilitation, optimize student engagement with hands on learning and are differentiated based on your students' progress data.

Section I.2a.4: ADAPTING CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

We will have a comprehensive approach to adapting the curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of all students. Data will drive all academic decisions we make at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, including serving as the driver for adapting our curriculum. *Driven by Data 2.0*, will serve as a primary text to guide our curriculum and instruction adaptation. As described on Amazon:

Driven by Data 2.0 is a practical guide that answers these questions to empower schools to achieve significant gains in student achievement. Rooted in a proven framework that has been implemented in thousands of schools, the book presents what makes schools successful along with tools to put the framework into place to make data work for your schools:

- Assess—set the roadmap for learning

- Analyze—identify why students struggle
- Act—teach more effectively what students need
- Build the culture—train and develop your staff so that data-driven instruction can thrive

Studies show schools that implement data-driven practices make tremendous gains in student

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achievement by focusing on the core drivers that affect student learning. Through strategic formative and summative academic practice, common language for academic and socioemotional expectations and practices, as well as intentional professional development systems, Sea Islands Heritage Academy's educators will be versed in monitoring scholar progress against standards. With scheduled meeting blocks designated and designed for educator collaboration, House leaders and classroom educators will work in tandem to ensure scholar success. As outlined by *Driven by Data 2.0*, our data systems to adapt curriculum include (described in **Section I.2c: Professional Development**):

- Weekly Data Meeting structures focusing on formative practices.
- Built-in Professional Development Data Days where teachers reflect on summative assessment data and then create 6 Week Plans based on scholar need.
- 6 Week Intervention Plans (as aligned to our Balanced, Year-round Calendar).

Response to Intervention (RTI) Plan

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we believe in individualized, high-quality academic and behavioral support for all scholars, evident in our Non-Negotiable Element of Personalized Learning and its accompanying system of Individualized Learning Plans described above. We understand the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), but also a commitment to maximizing all scholar learning through targeted, individualized, and data-informed support. As discussed in more detail below, our plans and programs to serve a diverse set of students will be carefully crafted in partnership with the families involved.

Our Student Advocate will lead the Response to Intervention process and all associated interventions. The Student Advocate will function similarly to a Special Education Coordinator. The Student Advocate's role will support scholar advocacy in their socioemotional and academic progress. The essential responsibilities of the Student Advocate are:

- Updates policy on all aspects of the district's special services and ensures compliance with standards, regulations, and state/federal laws.
- Assists with the coordination and supervision of all aspects of special services programs and personnel.
- Responsible for maintaining state and federal compliance for all identified subpopulations. • Assists with the coordination of activities of school psychologists, speech therapists, physical and occupational therapists.
- Conducts regular meetings with professional staff and other interested parties. • Coordinates departmental operations with other school district departments. • Serves on the school's committees for the disabled and instructional improvement and other administrative committees as needed.
- Participates in special consultations and case conferences with psychologists, other scholar

services personnel, building administrators, educators, families, and as appropriate with students.

- Assists in the development of programs for teachers relating to child behavior, child development, and conferences with parents.
- Maintains liaison with community mental health clinics, special schools, and other resources offering therapeutic services.

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- Acts as a liaison between schools and consulting psychiatrists.
- Assists with the development of a program of assessment through research and evaluation projects.
- Supervises the maintenance of case records on scholars and the completion of all required reports (i.e., IEPs and 504 accommodation plans).
- Assists in coordinating special transportation for scholars with disabilities.
- Provides opportunities for professional development.
- Performs other such tasks and assumes other such responsibilities as may from time to time be assigned.

To ensure support is equitably distributed, we will follow a Multi-Tiered System for Support (MTSS) at Sea Islands Heritage Academy. Similar to South Carolina Response to Intervention Assistance Guide (found [HERE](#)), MTSS is defined as an educational framework for continuous improvement, problem solving and decision-making. It features a continuum of support and services for students based on their level of need. MTSS offers a meaningful and effective way to organize instruction and intervention to help improve outcomes for all students. MTSS provides a framework that integrates all parts of scholar learning (academic and social/emotional) to provide the most meaningful intervention. The balanced and holistic approach depicts our comprehensive vision of tiered scholar support. Understanding the balance between SEL and academic learning in cultivating scholar success will be key for all educators at Sea Islands Heritage Academy.

Integrating both MTSS and the RTI guidance as provided, high-quality instruction will be guided by student performance data; academic, behavior, and sensory regulation interventions that are matched to student needs; and frequent progress monitoring to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals. From this foundation of high-quality instruction, scholar need will be determined through our universal screening (as described in **Section I.4: Objectives, Goals, and Assessments**). Based on the data provided by the universal screening process, scholars will be placed in either Tier 1 (80-90% of scholars), Tier 2 (2-5% of scholars), or Tier 3 (1-3% of scholars). As such, as scholars' Tier increases, as does the intervention support.

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our scholars are initially tiered through our universal screening process, both upon enrollment and through interim assessments (described in **Section I.4: Objectives, Goals, and Assessments**) throughout the school year. We will use multiple sources of data (i.e., formative assessments, summative assessments, benchmark exams, etc.) and valid, nationally normed assessments to identify individual student strengths and areas of need to inform decisions about skills-specific interventions, remediation, re-teaching, and enrichment for each scholar. All scholars enrolling at Sea Islands Heritage will participate in a universal screening process. This process will occur annually during the first week of school and will occur upon enrollment for scholars enrolling midyear, see **Section I.4: Goals, Objectives, and Assessments**. The screening process identifies scholars as quickly as reasonably possible to promptly support scholars performing below grade level and avoid a “wait and fail” scenario.

We will use MAP Growth assessments to benchmark and track all scholars' growth (BOY, MOY and EOY).

In a case study done in Oconee County School District, when employing MAP Growth, the district saw substantial growth amongst their 11,000 students, with one student gaining 29 points on winter testing, “he just sat [t]here and grinned.”²⁴ At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we will use data as the driver to both academic and socioemotional success. Similarly, to the student named in the Oconee County case study,

²⁴ MAP, N. W. E. A. (2019). *Achieving success in South Carolina by using MAP data to inform instruction*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED598437.pdf>.

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our scholars will feel joy and pride watching their skills progress, creating intrinsic motivation towards personalized goals. Research shows that students who are intrinsically motivated choose more challenging tasks and use strategies that require greater effort and lead to deeper information processing.²⁵ Studies have also connected intrinsic motivation to higher levels of academic achievement.²⁶

At Tier 1, our educators will deliver high-quality, differentiated instruction to all students for each research-based curriculum we’ve selected. Tier I supports are expected to support **above or below grade scholars (Section I.2a.4.i)** and scholars on the cusp of grade level standards; supporting South Carolina Charter State Law. Using our base curricula, English Language Learners are particularly supported through routines and strategies outlined in our selected materials. All curricular options are offered in multiple languages, so that English Language Learners are supported at all points. All educators will instruct during lesson rotations in 2 hour and 35 minutes long Humanities and STEM learning blocks (described in detail in **Section I.2a: Educational Structure**). Lesson rotations provide the structure, so scholars receive direct instruction in groups no larger than 12. Additionally, each learning block will have at least one rotation designated for independent practice for scholars to improve on specific skills identified through our screening processes or through course-based formative assessments. These rotations are structured for push in support from our Special Education educators (see **Appendix H** for number of Special Education Teachers). During this designated time, scholars will either complete self-directed practice (Tier I), skill-based small group instruction (Tier II), or individualized support via an Individual Educational Plans (Tier III). Educators will continuously monitor student progress through regular, standard aligned formative assessments. Moreover, socioemotional (SEL) and academic development is supported in tandem through our structure for family engagement, our House system (as described in **Section I.2a Non- Negotiable Elements**). Through having House leaders loop with scholars as they progress in grades, scholars will have heightened sense of belonging in their academic growth. Our biweekly monitoring of scholars Individualized Learning Plans, developed by Schoology, will be particularly for at risk scholars. Monitoring alongside family and educators will create a pathway for **at-risk scholars (Section I.2a.5)** to make incremental and realistic strides towards their goals and support all scholars in reaching and excelling in South Carolina grade level requirements. In addition to Tier 1 support, House Leaders of at risk scholars will meet monthly with our Student Advocate to monitor progress and ensure at risk scholars have the support he/she needs to be successful.

Sub-Group Academic and Social-Emotional Support:

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we understand the complexities of our scholars. For students to recognize their power through the attainment of education, their social-emotional needs must be trusted, seen, challenged, and valued (outlined explicitly in **Appendix T**). To deliver on our mission of providing an affirming environment for all scholars, we are responsible for supporting the social and emotional development of all our students. Our MTSS system includes behavioral tiering (described in **Appendix T**) that uses Clover’s SEL programming as foundational content. Our emphasis on building scholar recognition on **the fullness of their identities** is reflected in our decision to utilize the Clover Model Framework in our **socioemotional (SEL) Program (Section I.2a.4)**.

²⁵ Lepper, M. R. (1988). Motivational considerations in the study of instruction. *Cognition and Instruction*, 5(4), 289-309. ²⁶
Taylor, G., Jungert, T., Mageau, G. A., Schattke, K., Dedic, H., Rosenfield, S., & Koestner, R. (2014). A self-determination theory approach to predicting school achievement over time: The unique role of intrinsic motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 39, 342-358

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The Clover Model, developed by Dr. Gil G. Noam after two decades of comparative research across various developmental models, derives from developmental psychology (e.g., Erickson, Piaget). The Clover Model differs in that it is fundamentally grounded in the integration of all four domains and understands the interplays among these domains. The four competencies named in this framework include active engagement, assertiveness, belonging, and reflection, and they offer a common language that can communicate the strengths and challenges of our students.

The Holistic Student Assessment (HSA) is aligned with the Clover Model. It offers resources for measurement and data to ensure we are responsive to our students' social- emotional developmental needs. We have chosen to adopt and apply the Clover Model Framework at Sea Islands Heritage Academy because it has:

- Strengths-first approach to interacting with students.
- Emphasis on inter-and intra-personal domains, which heavily ties to our focus on identity development and to our vision of culture.
- Development of the external and internal skills needed to thrive.

Ideally, Tier 1 instruction should yield about 80-90% percent of students meeting grade-level requirements.

Through progress monitoring through the House system and frequent, standard-aligned summative and formative assessments, Tier II scholars will be identified. Although not all Tier II will be recommended for referral, Tier II identification could constitute Special Education services referral. A referral is simply a request for an evaluation. This referral can be made by the parent or guardian, the classroom teacher, any member of the school district (public or private). After the referral process, we anticipated 2-5% of scholars will fall in this tier. Scholars in this tier have been identified as "at risk" or advanced relative to grade level math and reading skills. These scholars receive additional support and instruction primarily in a small group setting of 3-5 for those students who benefit from further support. Based on MAP screenings, specific, skill-aligned instruction will be determined for Tier II. The systems and structures described throughout support students **at risk** of dropping out or not meeting grade level or graduation requirements (**Section I.2a.5**).

Suppose a scholar does not show sufficient progress after receiving Tier II interventions. In that case, the scholar's family will be informed and invited to join the school's Support Team for a referral for Special Education services. At that time, a Support Team meeting may be called to assess the student to determine whether he or she qualifies for special education services (**Section I.2a.4.ii**). After permission is obtained from the parent, the scholar may be tested by the school psychologist to determine eligibility for services. After testing, the Support Team (school psychologist, Academic Leadership Team administrator, classroom educator, Scholar Advocate, and parent) will gather to discuss the test results and determine what Tier III supports are needed.

It is imperative to note Tier III interventions are not necessarily special education. However,, if a disability is suspected, school staff will inform parents of their procedural safeguards and initiate a referral to determine if the student meets 504 or special education (IDEA) eligibility.

Suppose the scholar is eligible to receive special education services (such as a 504 or an IEP). In that case, the Scholar Advocate will propose an IEP, Individualized Education Plan, for the scholar and family. If the Support Team agrees to the IEP, the scholar will receive those services immediately. At that point, the Scholar Advocate will develop IEP goals alongside the scholar and their family. A scholar's Support

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Team will meet annually (or as often as any team member calls a meeting) to discuss the scholar's progress and whether they should make any changes to the IEP at that time. Because of the fluidity of the RTI process, scholars can move between tiers as needed to ensure that each child receives appropriate, individualized interventions.

Some Tier II and Tier III scholars will be enrolled in high-impact, targeted student support in the intersessions provided by our year-round calendar. Contingent upon scholars' growth trajectory, placement in our Interim Academic Support will be scheduled during scholars' intersessions. Through intensive support, developed by our Scholar Advocate, scholars receive strategic remediation support. The continuous learning scholars receive during Interim Academic Support will particularly support At Risk, Tier II and Tier III scholars in skill-specific support.²⁷

Scholars identified as **Gifted and Talented** will be particularly challenged through our self-directed practices during content rotations (**Section I.2a.4.iii**). When students master skills at or above grade level, they will have the option to explore additional modes of self-directed learning. A study²⁸ on the efficiency of self-directed learning models shares:

When children are active rather than passive participants in the learning process, they learn more, remember it longer, and develop more self confidence in their ability to figure things out on their own. This contributes to greater motivation for learning rather than doing what they are told by an adult.

The self-directed learning model provides a structured way for teachers to develop experiences that will move their students and themselves toward student-directed.

learning. Rather than assuming that gifted students already possess the self- management skills that will enable them to be independent learners, the model provides a way to develop these skills gradually. In this process, both teacher and student roles change drastically as students assume more responsibility. The teacher moves from director to a provider of options, and then to resource person or facilitator when needed by the student.

Gifted and talented scholars will use independent and collaborative rotations to pursue interests through self-directed learning online course platforms. Gifted and talented scholars will have access to courses on platforms such as Reconstruction.us, Zearn, and K12. These platforms all offer a variety of coursework aligned with South Carolina Standards. Additionally, scholars who are at or above grade level have access to high school coursework, allowing them to enter college-level coursework at an accelerated rate. As aligned with their Individualized Learning Plans and SC's allowed course work, gifted and talented students will participate in an additional project-based course. This will allow middle school students to accelerate their coursework and have access to college-level courses sooner. As a goal, described in totality in **Section I.3: Objectives, Goals, and Assessments**, 40% of Sea Islands Heritage Academy 11th and 12th grade scholars will be prepared for a dual enrollment course at USCB by year 8 of operation, having already graduated 2 previous graduated cohorts. This commitment to dual enrollment will be an expectation for scholars who have previously been identified as gifted and

²⁷ Stark Education Partnership. 400 Market Avenue North Suite B Plaza, Canton, OH 44702. Tel: 330-452-0829; Fax: 330-452-

2009; Web site: <http://www.edpartner.org>. (2018, September 30). *Using a balanced school year to improve student achievement. a white paper of the stark education partnership*. Stark Education Partnership. Retrieved September 26, 2021, from ²⁸ <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=self%2Bdirected%2C%2Bgifted&ft=on&id=EJ890561>.
Fakolade, O. A. A. (2009, November 30). Efficacy of ENRICHMENT triad and Self-Direct models on academic achievement of gifted students in SELECTED secondary schools in Nigeria. *International Journal of Special Education*. Retrieved September 26, 2021, from <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=self%2Bdirected%2C%2Bgifted&ft=on&id=EJ890561>.

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talented.

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we are keenly aware that **English Language learners** (Section I.2) have unique challenges that require intentionality in planning academic content and strategies. That will require us to have frequent data-step backs with our educators, which will be an integral part of our practice at Sea Islands Heritage Academy. We believe that the more frequent leaders and teachers reflect on data (at minimum weekly, ideally daily), the faster they can adjust instruction for students, thereby closing inequitable gaps. We will also run inquiry cycles that are between two and six weeks long to identify and test interventions and then continue to monitor the data on a weekly basis to assess progress. Educators will commit to responses such as re-teach strategies, regrouping of students, priority students to focus on, and additional tutoring and intervention. In Beaufort County, EL learners represent about 14%; however, in our target zip codes EL learners represent 3% of the population. As such, we estimate we will likely serve <5% EL scholars. Teachers with EL learners in their classroom will be provided training on WIDA best practices for teaching students learning the English language (**Section I.2a.4.iii**). This training will also be done by all on the Academic Leadership Team, inclusive of Content Leaders. For instance, training around instructional strategies may include honoring the “silent period,” a stage when EL scholars tend not to be vocal as they are still developing confidence in their new language. Although visual aids are Tier I supports at Heritage Academy, for EL scholars’ additional visual aids and non-verbal cues to provide alternative communication paths for scholars learning English. Many of our Tier I supports—highlighting a supportive, affirming environment with two educators in all academic courses—will create the environment necessary for scholars to feel the sense of belonging necessary for a diverse set of scholars to grow.

[Section I.2a.5: AT-RISK SCHOLARS](#)

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we have developed our Individualized Learning Plans, House System, and MTSS framework with the intent to support and monitor progress of all scholars on a consistent basis; thus, identifying at-risk scholars early. However, we understand the need to plan for scholars who are at risk of dropping out or not meeting grade level or graduation requirements. In the case a student is identified as at risk of drop out (e.g., failing to pass courses, not meeting expectations on state exams, truancy, etc.) the first step will be to review his or her records and develop a holistic plan specific to the scholar’s needs. Families and school staff will work together to gain understanding of any non-academic factors that may be impacting the student’s learning. School counselors will work with scholars, families, and staff to provide the resources and understanding required to properly support the student’s social and emotional well-being. If deemed appropriate by the school counselor or leadership team, the student may also be assigned an additional mentor, as determined by the scholars’ House Leader, parents, and assigned by the Community Advocate. With these components in place, the focus will then shift to academic remediation. This can be accomplished in multiple ways, including:

- Revisions or implementations of differentiated instruction
- Remediation mini-courses during Intersessions
- Tutoring during our after-school program
- Use of technology to supplement all aforementioned options

Furthermore, guidance counselors will keep track of all scholars' progress toward meeting graduation requirements by creating an Individualized Graduation Plan (IGP). They are adapted from Louisiana's IGP, Appendix G-7, allowing counselors to keep track of scholars' requirements over time. Depending on

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the courses needed, the student may be able to utilize APEX: a computer-based credit recovery program for selecting failed courses with a FINAL grade of 50-59. Once a scholar completes the outlined APEX curriculum, grades are recovered for a 60. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will work to accommodate the program's cost for scholars needing assistance. For other courses, scholars could opt to utilize VirtualSC: a free state-sponsored online program that offers courses aligned to state standards. These online options should only be viewed by at-risk scholars that find themselves in time sensitive situations regarding graduation or other hardship situations, as affirmed by school guidance.

Section I.2a.6: HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we align with the South Carolina Board of Education's belief that high school should prepare scholars to graduate with world-class knowledge based on rigorous standards in language arts and math for college and career readiness.²⁹As such, at Heritage Academy, we will follow South Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) Regulation 43-234 that lists course requirements for public high school scholars to graduate with a South Carolina High School Diploma.

To graduate with a South Carolina High School Diploma, Sea Islands Heritage Academy students will be required to attain 24 high school credits, as outlined by SBE Regulation 43-234.

Moreover, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will adhere to all graduation requirements and guidelines pertinent to grades 9-12, as outlined in the aforementioned document. This includes, but is not limited to, the following mandates:

- Earn 4 units of mathematics
- Complete English I, II, III, IV or their course equivalents to receive 4 units of English language arts
- Earn 3 units of science, for which at least one course requires an administered end-of-course exam (in South Carolina, Biology 1 was chosen to fulfill this requirement)
- Earn 1 unit of U.S. History and Constitution
- Earn a half unit each for economics and U.S. Government
- Earn 1 unit from another social studies
- Earn 1 unit of physical education or Junior ROTC
- Earn 1 unit of computer science
- Earn 1 unit of foreign language or career and technology education
- Earn 7 units of electives

Recent history has shown us the need for scholars to be flexible across all mediums. To ensure that our high school scholars have practice with virtual instruction, scholars will learn in a Blended Learning (BL) model. BL is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for online learning with traditional place-based classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some elements of structure in skill progression. Schools that practice BL better prepare scholars for the independent learning necessary in college and beyond.³⁰At Sea Islands

²⁹ Code of laws - title 59 - Chapter 1 - General Provisions (SECTION 59-1-50). Code of laws - title 59 - Chapter General Provisions. (n.d.). Retrieved October 10, 2021, from <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c001.php>.
³⁰ Geng, S., Law, K. M. Y., & Niu, B. (2019, May 21). Investigating self-directed learning and technology readiness in blending learning environment. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*. Retrieved October 10, 2021, from <https://educationaltechnologyjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41239-019-45>

Heritage Academy, high school scholars will take some courses online and some courses in a traditional setting. That said, according to our intended curriculum's website:

The Summit Learning Platform (SLP) does not replace teachers or face-to-face instruction. There is no set amount of screen time. Instead, students are empowered to use the Platform as a tool to support their learning, enabling them to access content in a way that meets their learning style and showing them their progress toward their goals.

Although this is an innovative approach, scholars will meet or exceed the academic performance standards and expectations aligned with the academic standards adopted by the State Board of Education. Research shows that BL creates a rich learning environment that positively impacts students' ability to direct themselves in learning and effectiveness. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, scholars will graduate with skills outlined in South Carolina's Code of Laws Title 59 SECTION 59-1-50, skills in creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration and teamwork; communication, information, media, and technology; and knowing how to learn.

In finding a curriculum that supports Blended Learning, Sea Islands Heritage Academy has identified Summit Learning Platform (SLP) as a strong platform for proven scholar achievement. SLP has a dashboard that provides scholars' progress reports and can create achievement groupings based on standards. We believe the blended, project-based nature of SLP will support our scholars' strong foundation set by our 6-8th grade curriculum. As such, SLP will be our chosen curriculum for high school scholars. SLP is an online platform that requires teacher support in both direct instruction and remediation, thus SLP is a strong choice in both creating personalized learning pathways and supporting the flexibility necessary for a BL model.

As described on their website, SLP is:

A free online tool that powers teaching and learning. The Summit Learning Platform allows every student to have a personalized learning experience because it is catered to each individual student's goals, aspirations, and dreams. On the platform, students set individual goals, create roadmaps to achieve them, learn content at their own pace, and dive into meaningful Projects that connect to the real world

....With the platform, teachers have complete access to see how their students are performing on a daily basis, and use that data to personalize instruction and provide additional support through mentoring and coaching. The platform comes with a comprehensive curriculum developed by teachers in classrooms and each course includes meaningful Projects, rigorous content, and assessments, all of which can be customized. Teachers can adapt or create new content and Projects to meet their students' needs.

Upon approval. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will apply to become a partner with Summit Learning Platform (SLP) please see **Appendix C- 3** Letters of Support for evidence of Sea Islands Heritage Academy's relationship with SLP. SLP will be adapted to follow the "SC Standard Transcript Template for PowerSchool" that is developed by the SC Office of Research and Data Analysis (ORDA). This

template provides standardized reports for students when applying for SC scholarships through the SC Commission on Higher Education. These templates also provide a standard report for student data

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transfer between schools and colleges/universities, and fulfill the internal reporting needs for school administrators, students, parents, and teachers tracking changes in students' coursework. In addition to each student's personal information (e.g., name, gender, ID number), the transcript will also include the Course ID, Course Title, grade earned, and credit earned for each course. It will also contain the student's GPA summary, which will be calculated using South Carolina Uniform Grading Policy with consideration for the following: "consistent numerical breaks for letter grades; consideration of standards to define an honors course; appropriate weighting of courses; and determination of courses and weightings to be used in the calculation of class rank."

2b. Educational Structure

Section I.2b.8 UNIQUE FEATURES

The unique characteristics of Sea Islands Heritage Academy that are essential to the success of our educational program include:

1. Year-round academic calendar
2. Interim Intersession Programming
3. Extended school day with Community Engagement (leveraging local partnerships)
4. Open concept, Multiage Classroom

Unique Feature #1: Year-round academic calendar

As described in detail **Section I.2a: Instructional Model**, our structural choice to have a year-round calendar with approximately 9-week semesters, 3-week intersessions or school breaks, and a 5-week summer break. Research shows year-round academic calendars are particularly effective in improving teacher satisfaction. A Simpson College study found that "year-round teachers held an especially high regard for their school and their colleagues, and appreciated the short, frequent breaks for reflection and relaxation." At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, scholars will participate in Intersession or remedial programming, and educators will use the time to reflect, develop professionally (especially data-driven steps, as outlined in **Section I.2d: Professional Development**), and reset. This will be particularly impactful in reaching our academic goals. In addition, the frequent data-driven step backs with our educators will be an integral part of our practice at Sea Islands Heritage Academy. We believe that the more frequently that leaders and teachers reflect on data (at minimum weekly, ideally daily), the faster they can adjust instruction for scholars, thereby closing inequitable gaps. We will also run inquiry cycles that are between three and seven weeks long to identify and test interventions and then continue to monitor the data on a weekly basis to assess progress. Educators will commit to responses such as re-teach strategies, regrouping of students, priority students to focus on, and additional tutoring and intervention.

Unique Feature #2: Interim Intersession Programming

As described in detail **Section I.2a: Instructional Model**, our structural choice to populate intersession programming with community experiences, internships, or remedial support. In the long-term, we seek to broaden career pathways that are rooted in and celebrate the Gullah Geechee heritage to ensure we invest our people's talent and resources in our communities; our intersession programming will help

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accomplish this goal. As described above, the internship categories—arts, history, civics, and natural history—have been chosen by community members during our Design Team Meetings to reflect the fullness of Gullah Geechee identity. This programming will allow scholars to exposure to a wide variety of career pathways that would enable them to remain in the Gullah Geechee corridor to build their lives and careers well after completing their formal education.

Unique Feature #3: Extended school day with Community Engagement (leveraging local partnerships), At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our doors open at 8am and the day ends at 4:15pm. The extended school day allows for academic deep dives, which aligns to our deep learning initiatives. With longer academic blocks, scholars can experience the natural curiosity leading them to explore related topics as they think critically and interact meaningfully with the content. Scholars will learn in two, 2-hour 35- time blocks with 45-minute lesson rotations, creating the structure necessary for scholars to engage in our **place-based educational framework** and **personalized learning** authentically. As described in more detail in our Educational Structure, educators will use the extended school day hours to understand, and address scholar needs. Additionally, the extra time allows for the goal-setting, meaningful relationship building, and socioemotional learning key to our mission. This demonstrates ways that our extended school day prioritizes the deep, purposeful learning of students. Additionally, to ensure we are **powered by community**, all normal school days scholars will participate in "Community Engagement." During this period, scholars will work with community organizations on quarter-long projects which will extend into scholars' Intersession experience. As identified in **Appendix C-3: Letters of Support** this program will be executed in conjunction with Human Services Interns from USCB. The Community Advocate will oversee this period and partnership with USCB. These can range from musical storytelling to historical archiving; but each project is coordinated by a local community organization and connects to scholars' Intersession experience. Please see **Appendix C-3: Letters of Support** for evidence of community organizations willing to support Community Engagement programming.

Unique Feature #4: Open concept, multiage classroom

Borrowing from Montessori practices, middle school scholars at Sea Islands Heritage Academy will learn in a large classroom built for 50-60 scholars and 4 staff members. The scholars in our middle school classroom will range from grades 6-8, with no more than 20 scholars per grade level in each classroom. During each 2 hour and 35-minute Learning Block, scholars will rotate into three 45-minute lessons. While lessons are happening, scholars receive direct instruction in differentiated small groups, work independently, or participate in a collaborative activity or discussion. Our curriculum choices (described in **Section I.2a: Curriculum Choices**) fully align with our curricular choices to our unique open concept, multiage classroom. The multiage classroom ensures **personalized learning** as educators will teach the same lesson content in differentiated small groups. The lesson rotation structure creates the conditions for small group instruction. In grades 9-12, scholars will participate in similar multiage learning space; however, they will be distinguished by content and upper (11 and 12th grade) and lower (9th and 10th) grade levels. Grouping students by upper and lower grade levels allows for scholars to have similar leadership opportunities while acknowledging the increased rigor demands as scholars progress.

Our open concept, multiage classrooms create the conditions for improved student learning in a trusting learning environment. Studies have found "relational trust among adults is essential for effective school improvement. School communities with high relational trust are home to... more

experimentation, better decision-making, and improved student learning.” With all of their classes co-taught by the same two educators, scholars have a greater ability to build a trusting, vulnerable relationship that allows for deep learning to occur. Furthermore, our decision for an open concept,

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multiage learning environment is informed by our non-negotiable element of a **proactive school culture**. A RAND Education Writing Series researcher found that students in multiage settings were more likely than their peers to have positive self-concepts, high self-esteem, and good attitudes toward school. This unique feature creates the condition by which scholar-centered learning is truly at the forefront.

Section I.2b.9 and Section I.2b.10 PROPOSED GROWTH PLAN

When at full capacity, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will serve 585 scholars in grades 6-12. In year 1 (2024-25), Sea Islands Heritage Academy will open with 150 scholars in grade 6 (75 scholars) and grade 7 (75 scholars) and then add a new cohort of 75 sixth graders each year thereafter until the school is fully built out with all grade levels. The lack of small-fee high school options encouraged us to add 15 additional scholars in 9th grade, creating a middle school (grades 6-12) of 225 scholars and a high school of 360 scholars. As all of all learning spaces will be open concept, multiage learning spaces, there will be three middle school cohorts with 50-60 scholars total (approximately 20-25 scholars per grade); high school will be comprised of content-specific cohorts with 90 scholars per grade (**Section I.2b.9**). This slow growth model is by design for two key reasons:

1. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will develop a positive school culture and successful academic program from the very first day of operation. This is more likely to occur with a smaller founding staff and 150 scholars vs. a much larger founding staff and 585 scholars. Additionally, the single-grade growth plan allows for more personalized learning environment to give incoming scholars the needed acceleration; ability to sustain school culture—returning scholars are familiar with practices can positively influence new scholars; the smaller number of staff will help school leadership team select the most qualified staff; and administration can cultivate strong leadership style and establish a solid foundation of best practices.
2. Financial sustainability and conservative approach given its nature as an open enrollment public school without students of zone assigned to attend the school, the prospective Sea Islands Heritage Academy Board of Directors supports being good stewards of state taxpayer funds. This means growing in a slower, but smart and sustainable way. Without access to local capital funds as district-managed public schools have, finding or developing a building to house 585 scholars in year 1 with no previous credit profile or credit history would require near impossible loan terms that may pose risks to the budget health and sustainability of Sea Islands Heritage Academy. There would also be a significant challenge to recruit 585 new scholars in grades 6-12 for year 1 of operation. Thus, it is Sea Islands Heritage Academy’s approach to recruit a smaller number of scholars in year 1 and manage the financial health of the school via a conservative approach to operations and the school’s budget, See **Appendix X and Y: 5 and 10 Year Budget**. This will enable the school to build up its financial reserves to expand our facility over years of operation.

Opening with two cohorts of 75 students per cohort, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will then add one grade of 75 scholars for each year of operation until full capacity (585) is met in year seven. Considering the urgent need in high schools, we plan to add 15 scholars in grade 9 so that each grade in the high school houses 90 scholars. To account for attrition, we will recruit and backfill for any unclaimed seats. When backfilling, specifically in high school, with scholars who may need credit recovery, we will be transparent in our communication to ensure a direct path to graduation. To that end, onboarding

scholars who are entering beyond 10th grade will include discussion and collaborative development of

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ILPs and IGPs with scholars and their families, so that parents and students know exactly where they are in terms of your program and what is needed to successfully complete the program and graduate from Sea Islands Heritage Academy.

Our growth plan is provided below and in **Appendix G-8, Figure 19 (Section I.2b.9)**:

Figure 19: Sea Islands Heritage Academy Growth Plan								
	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31	FY32
Grade 6	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
Grade 7	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
Grade 8		75	75	75	75	75	75	75
Grade 9			90	90	90	90	90	90
Grade 10				90	90	90	90	90
Grade 11					90	90	90	90
Grade 12						90	90	90
Total	150	225	300	390	480	570	585	585

Please reference **Appendix F** for the Daily School Schedule. We will seek to fill all seats at Sea Islands Heritage Academy once emptied. This will ensure that as many scholars as possible in our target communities will have access to a high-quality educational option.

Section I.2b.11 and Section I.2b.12 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT & STRUCTURE

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, all decisions about schedule have been informed by our ambitious mission: **we partner with the community to provide a 6th-12th grade educational experience that empowers and prepares all scholars to recognize the fullness of their identities to determine, pursue, and succeed the future of their choice.** Our school’s schedule creates the time structure necessary for scholars to explore content with the depth necessary to increase scholar learning.

The grades 6-8 and grades 9-12 anticipated daily schedules can be found in **Appendix F**. The school year calendar can also be found in **Appendix F**. Sea Islands Heritage Academy intends to open our doors beginning at 8:00 a.m. for breakfast and to dismiss scholars at **4:15pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday**. On Wednesdays, scholars will have early release to account for teacher professional development. On Wednesday, the day begins at 8:00 a.m. and ends at 1:30 p.m. The early release on Wednesday will allow for a weekly 2-hour block of high-quality teacher professional development. Sea Islands Heritage Academy values high-quality instruction and the weekly 2 hours on Wednesday will

ensure that our teaching staff has scheduled and protected time to prepare high-quality lesson plans, review scholar data, and receive continuous coaching throughout the year.

For all scholars, grades 6-12, the instructional school day will begin at 8:30 a.m. with a House Meeting followed by two learning blocks, each for two hours and 35-minute-long learning blocks, a period of Community Engagement, and a check out House Meeting at the end of the day. Beginning and ending the day with a House Meeting will provide the time for scholars to prepare for the day by checking-in, self-regulating, and setting goals. House Meetings allow students time to transition from home to the school learning environment. This block of time allows for each scholar to have a biweekly 10-minute check-in with his or her House Leader, as well as the time necessary to complete any work not completed. Furthermore, these universal time blocks allow the opportunities for cross-grade level learning to happen. Research shows that scholars are positively impacted by peer mentoring.³¹ These universal time blocks create the structure by which positive peer systems can be implemented. When fully grown, it is anticipated that high school House Meetings may happen in the same space as middle school house meetings. This will allow for older scholars to mentor and support younger scholars.

Scholars will participate in two 2-hour and 35-minute-long learning blocks as described in detail in the Instructional Model section. Considering the Montessori structure of Work Cycles— an uninterrupted work block with independent goals and lessons—our learning blocks will allow for scholars to experience direct instruction through three forty five minute small group rotations. Before entering the learning block, scholars develop organizational and time management skills by writing their daily rotation schedule. An example of the systems needed for the learning block, learning block rotations, daily schedule, and checklist can be found in **Appendix G-9**. A recent paper on the Montessori middle school credited the work cycle, similar to our learning block, and its aligned systems describe above, as key to developing “[the] executive functioning skills [and] the self-management tools that students need to manage their time, organize and plan their workload, focus their attention, follow directions, and develop mental skills such as working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control.”³²

Because learning happens in longer blocks and instruction is based on a rigorous, standards-aligned curriculum, educators will have the time necessary for direct instruction, collaborative learning, and revision work. This extended time benefits scholars as they are given a variety of modalities to learn content and explore its application. A particular benefit of this structural decision is the focus on small group instruction. These learning block rotations are optimal for scholars at Sea Islands Heritage Academy because it allows educators to prioritize the needs of no more than 12 scholars at a given time. This focus allows for differentiated and personalized learning that meets scholars where they are. A Harvard teaching and learning guide has studied the learning science has found that “small-group learning (when compared to competitive and individualistic learning) improves academic achievement, relationships with classmates and faculty, and promotes psychological well-being.”³³ Considering the

³¹ Goodrich, Andrew. 2022. *Valuing racialized student voices: Transforming learning through peer mentoring. Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 21 (1): 143–72.

<https://doi.org/10.22176/act21.1.143>

³² Lapon, E. (2020). Montessori Middle School and the Transition to High School: Student Narratives. *Journal of Montessori*

Research, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.17161/jomr.v6i2.13854> ³³ *Guide to Small Group Learning - Harvard Kennedy School*. (n.d.).

Retrieved October 28, 2022, from

<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Academic%20Dean's%20Office/Guide%20to%20Small%20Group%20Learning.pdf>

volatility in need of our anticipated population, prioritizing small group instruction during our learning blocks will positively impact student achievement for all scholars.

When scholars are not receiving direct instruction through educator led curriculum lessons, scholars will participate in a rotation of either collaboration/independent practice or a rotation of educator-led discussion, revision, or reflection. Scholars will participate in two learning blocks on all normal days. Described in detail below, learning blocks will be on a block schedule. This will mean that ELA and math occurs Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, while social studies and science occurs on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The Community Engagement block, consistent in all grades, will allow scholars to alternate between Physical Education and working alongside a community organization. Allotting this time creates the space and structure for community partnerships and the necessary time for scholars to participate in physical education.

Middle school scholars will have two 155 minutes daily total in learning blocks. As learning blocks have 5-minute breaks built in, along with the 45-minute rotations, scholars will spend 270 minutes daily in rotations either receiving educator-led curriculum lessons; participate in a rotation of either collaboration/independent practice; or a rotation of educator-led discussion, revision, or reflection. Lesson rotations on a block schedule will account for ~405 minutes weekly in ELA/Math and ~270 minutes weekly in Science/History.

In high school, scholars will learn in an alternating block schedule (A/B Days), with the early release day having a more flexible schedule. Scholars will learn in an alternating block schedule with History/Science daily 120-minute block alterations and English Language Arts/Math in daily 180-minute block alterations. There will also be a daily 60-minute elective block. This will account for 480 instructional minutes weekly in History/Science and 720 instructional minutes weekly in ELA/Math; additionally, the elective block will account for 240 minutes of electives and foreign Languages.

High school scholars will learn in a self-directed, Blended Learning (BL) environment due to our relationship with Summit Learning Platform. BL is an approach to education that combines online educational materials and opportunities for online learning with traditional place-based classroom methods. As described in detail in the Instructional Model section, it requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some elements of structure in skill progression. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, scholars will take courses (<25%) online and in a traditional setting. Although this is an innovative approach, scholars will meet or exceed the academic performance standards and expectations aligned with the academic standards adopted by the State Board of Education using the Summit Learning Platform. Summit Learning Platform provides scholars with an independent course of study; however, scholars synthesize their learning in seminar-style classes led by classroom educators.

The school day is 8 hours, with 6.0 of those hours spent on academic instruction. The extended school day will ensure scholars exceed learning expectations with all minutes used purposefully and time on task maximized. This amounts to 30 hours of academic instruction provided each week at both the middle and high school levels. These totals do not include the additional instruction, remediation, or enrichment students will receive if they attend the after-school or interim programs.

Sea Islands Heritage Academy’s learning environment is a student-centered, classroom-based environment that is guided by our non-negotiable elements: (1) Personalized Learning, (2) Placed-Based Educational Framework, (3) Proactive School Culture, and (4) Powered by Community. With the vast majority of scholars in our target community’s Priority Zone living in poverty and below grade level (described in **Section I.1: Evidence of Need and Community Support**), our educational structure is one that gives time for meaningful relationship building to be embedded into the academic day and to be the bedrock of targeting scholar support. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we know that deeply engaged scholars have higher academic achievement. Our optimal learning environment is structured to support engagement, relationship building, and academic intervention.

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy our commitment **to empowering and preparing all scholars to recognize the fullness of their identity to determine, pursue, and succeed the future of their choice**, begins with a learning environment that prioritizes choice, community, and personalization. Our open concept, multiage classrooms will be between 1800-2000sq ft and have flexible seating options, **Section III.2: Facilities**, details facilities expectations and plans to support this model. Seating will include space for approximately 60 scholars, in grades 6-8 and 90 scholars in grades 9-12, in tables, trapezoid desks, and other flexible seating. Additionally, as seen in **Appendix G-10, Figure 20**, these spaces will also be designated spaces for small group instruction. It is important to note that these flexible learning spaces will help facilitate both self-directed and small group instruction.

Figure 20: Flexible Learning Spaces



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To accomplish our goal of **personalized learning**, our educators need to be deep seekers of qualitative and quantitative data on scholars. Our open concept, multiage classrooms provide the time and consistency to build deep, meaningful relationships that are rooted in academic excellence and informed by scholar assets. In both middle and high school extended learning blocks for deep learning provide opportunities for learning that are not restricted by time. Additionally, this **teaching method** provides an opportunity for meaningful relationships to be built within the class. Moreover, the extended learning period allows for scholars to learn through their academic mistakes. With daily rotations, scholars will receive targeted intervention or revise work based on teacher feedback. In viewing meaningful relationships as the cornerstone of our programming, our schedule and calendar decisions reflect a need to prioritize relationship building and to mentor, thus continuing to the foundation of our **proactive school culture**.

Our **place-based educational framework** is an **instructional design** choice, where learning is extended beyond the traditional classroom walls. Educators are afforded the time and structures to consider how learning is integrated into the classroom and is rooted in our high-quality instructional **curriculum**. Our **schedule** and calendar are structured in a way that scholars' new knowledge can be learned and become relevant through real world experience in one learning block. Our structure and schedule create the opportunity for learning to be deep and exploratory. To support scholars in determining, pursuing, and succeeding in the future of their choice, scholars must have the time to explore careers in pathways **powered by the community**. In both the flexibility provided on high school scholars' Wednesdays and during biweekly (2x/week) 45-minute designed time for Community Engagement, scholars will have the opportunity to apply their learning to impact the community. In doing so, we highlight our mission's goal

of empowerment through leveraging community.

Finally, our campus layout reflects an Optimal Learning Environment as it honors the Gullah Geechee practice of a family compound. In middle school, scholars' self-contained classrooms will be Learning Cottages. Described in greater detail in **Section III.2: Facilities** our Learning Cottages will allow for enough space for scholars to become a "family" in their classroom cohorts. We anticipate that many of our scholars will remain in the same cohort from grades 6-8, creating opportunities for educator continuity and relationships. See **Appendix G-11, Figure 21** to see a rendering of a Phase 1 of construction, middle school pod. Although the high school facility's development is still in progress, we know SLP encourages more independent studies and that scholars will need carrel spaces to work independently and collaborative spaces to mentor, have group discussions, small group intervention, and collaborative workspaces. This vision has been derived and developed from Design Team Meetings, as described in **Section I.1: Community Need and Support**.

Figure 21: Middle School Pod



Kaiden Johnson (Prospective 6th grade scholar) Typical Wednesday:

Kaiden Johnson always loved Wednesdays. Even before his mom enrolled him in Sea Islands Heritage Academy, Wednesdays always felt like the highest peak of the week, looking at Monday and the weekend on either side. But since he came to Heritage, he especially loved Wednesdays since they are short days!

Sitting in the back seat as his mom pulls up to Sea Islands Heritage Academy, Kaiden is already smiling, seeing Mr. Matthews and Dr. Davis dancing as they open the car doors for scholars stopping at the drop-off line. Mr. Matthews opens Kaiden's door. "How's Katie doing, Mrs. Johnson?" Mr. Matthews is Kaiden's House Leader, and from their check-in last week, he knows that his little sister, Katie, has not been feeling well and that Kaiden has been struggling to sleep because of it. Kaiden shakes Mr. Matthews' hand and walks in as he and his mom finish at the car.

As Kaiden walks the path to his classroom, he's greeted by teachers waiting at their front door to welcome in their scholars. He arrives at his classroom, South Carolina State, to see Mrs. Page at the door. "Good morning, Kaiden. What's been the best part of your morning so far?" Kaiden laughs through a brief telling of this morning's dancing car line and heads to the classroom. Although music is playing throughout the campus, in the morning, classrooms are quiet spaces where we work at a library speaking level. Some scholars are at a desk, others are sitting on the couches, and others are at the tables, looking over their computers. Kaiden waves across the room to a friend or two put his coat on his chair and grabs breakfast.

Before returning to his seat, Kaiden picks up the materials he needs for the day. Looking up at the projector, he sees a graphic from Mrs. Page with the day's schedule and any whole-grade reminders. He's glad he looked because he almost forgot to get his lab log in his cubby! At his seat, Kaiden

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organizes his desk for the materials he needs. He enjoys the soft classical music played by Mrs. Page as he opens his computer, seeing an email from Mr. Matthews: "Looking forward to checking in today, Kaiden. Remember to have 1 or 2 reflections on your action step from last week. See you soon, pal!" Kaiden clicks over to his Individual Learning Plan document, scans over his action step from last week, and jots down a couple of reflections in his House notebook.

At 8:30 a.m., the bell chimes, and Kaiden transitions to his first block for the day-- STEM. Because it's a Wednesday, he won't get to go with Dr. Mack for intervention; that's okay because it's lab day! This unit was on the number system. They're going out to the water to measure its density in different locations and create a conversion table during the first lesson rotation. After the lab, Kaiden spends his second lesson rotation at his table, reflecting on the lab process. With his lab sheet complete, Kaiden heads to his third rotation—a discussion block!

Led by Mr. Joseph, the Place Base Fellow (otherwise known as a teaching assistant), the discussion rotation allows his group members to discuss the lab and its function in the classroom and his community. By the end of the block, Kaiden (and the rest of the class) is curious about why the density is different along different parts of the water's edge. Kaiden's wheels are already spinning!

Kaiden then transitions into Humanities. He quickly gets his materials to co-lead his Literary Circle for his first lesson rotation. Before going into his Literary Circle, he and his co-leader, Janine, an 8th grader, go over the questions they'll ask his group. He loves working with Janine on his Literary Circles because she always knows the best questions to ask to get his group talking! Their group had been independently reading *Warriors Don't Cry* for the last few weeks, and with the help of reading conferences with his

teacher, Mrs. Page, Kaiden had been working on understanding how the author develops a point of view. He was excited to ask his group the big question he and Janine developed: "What role do kids have in confronting injustice?" Kaiden introduced the question last week when the group met, and they had been independently gathering secondary sources from history to support their thinking. Kaiden pauses while his Circle is discussing and looks around. He sees Dr. Mack noting participation from the two Literary Circle groups; scholars at their laptops, doing independent learning; and Mrs. Page at her desk, conferencing with two scholars. This is why Kaiden loves Wednesday-- there are so many moving parts!

After Humanities, Kaiden transitions to lunch. Because he was Scholar of the Week last week, he has earned the privilege, along with the other Scholars of the Week, of eating lunch with Ms. Jenkins! At lunch, Kaiden talks about his goals for the next week and how his football season has been going.

After lunch, Kaiden transitions to his House Meeting space. Mr. Matthews has already arranged the 12 chairs in a circle. Mr. Matthews leads a whole group check-in. Kaiden has "passed" for the past two mornings, but he was ready to share today. When it was Kaiden's turn, he shared about his sister, his lack of sleep, and asked for accountability from his classmates to make sure he catches up on his missed assignment. After checking in, Kaiden walks over to Mr. Matthews' desk, ready for his check-in. After checking in about grades, socioemotional progress, and any planned communication, Mr. Matthews establishes the next steps Kaiden will need to take.

With a plan in hand, Kaiden heads back to his seat and begins working on the tasks on the lists. After finishing two, Kaiden reflects on his gratitude for having a weekly check-in with Mr. Matthews. After completing the tasks on the list, Kaiden has about 10 minutes left of the House Meeting. Kaiden takes out his book and starts his homework until the Community Meeting.

During Community Meeting, Kaiden dances along as the drums welcome the scholars and teachers in.

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Ms. Jenkins talks about the meaning of self-determination and scholars who have shown this value in the last week. Now's time for Kaiden's favorite part--Scholar of the Week. Because he earned it last week, he knows this is not his week, but he cannot wait to cheer on his classmate!

At the end of the day, Kaiden and other scholars head on the bus to Morning Glory Homestead. As part of their Community Engagement, Kaiden has been learning about the agricultural history and industry from local farmers. Along with his other classmates and Mr. Jones, Kaiden is helping to till a plot so scholars can begin to work on a Living History Garden, connecting their learning in Humanities to the science of farming. Because it's Wednesday, Kaiden did not have Community Engagement for class; he just went because he wanted to learn more from the Jones family that runs the farm! Kaiden's mom doesn't mind picking him up from the farm, it's right around the corner from the school, and she is happy to let Kaiden know she's heard a positive update from Dr. Mack about leading his Literacy Circle. She is so proud of him. Kaiden is so proud of himself and can't wait to go to Sea Islands Heritage Academy in the morning!

Kaiden's experience is different from other sixth graders at other schools in a number of ways:

- During morning House Meeting Kaiden had the opportunity to practice self-regulation and goal setting (**Proactive School Culture**).
- Throughout the day, scholars are exercising choice from multiple seating options to how to participate with the materials (**Proactive School Culture**).
- Due to the open concept, multiage model, he gets attention from both educators through small group instruction and conferencing (**Personalized Learning**).

- Kaiden develops his autonomy and executive functioning through independently managing his time by writing down his rotation schedule throughout the learning block (**Personalized Learning**).
- During the learning block, Kaiden works with scholars across different grade levels, modeling his academic and behavioral expectations after the older scholar's (**Proactive School Culture**). • Chosen curriculum and aligned **Place-Based Education** project development allows Kaiden to tie his learning to his real-life experiences.
- The extended class period earlier in the week provided time for Kaiden's class to apply their **Place-Based** learning outdoors (even on an early release day).
- Having multiple teachers in the room provided the opportunity for a variety of personalized learning to happen based on need (**Personalized Learning**). His teachers always seem to know where he needs extra support, and he knows he can ask for and receive help at any time (**Proactive School Culture**).
- The lunch meeting reward creates an opportunity for the administration to be connected to scholars (**Proactive School Culture**).
- In Community Meeting, Kaiden has the opportunity to express joy for his classmates (**Proactive School Culture**).
- Kaiden loves the structured opportunity for Community Engagement so much that he volunteers there on his own time, exploring a possible career pathway (**Powered by Community**). • Kaiden's teachers communicate with family frequently to share his successes (**Proactive School Culture**)!

Nina Jackson (Prospective 10th-grade scholar) Typical Friday:

Nina sits in the front seat of her mom's car as they wait in line to drop off her and her two sisters. Her sisters are new 6th graders at Sea Islands Heritage Academy and, having been at the school since 6th grade, Nina knows how to make sure they start strong. While they turned the corner, Nina looked over her sisters' weekly checklist, ensuring they were ready to turn in their weekly work today. As they pull up to the front of the line, Nina hands her sisters back their checklists and hops out of the car.

Making her way to one of the high school buildings, she is greeted by Mr. Bailey and Ms. Jones who hand out fruit and breakfast bags to scholars. Although Nina does not grab breakfast, she does take a moment to talk to Ms. Jones, her House Leader about some challenges she had in completing a task for another class. Ms. Jones reminds Nina of the earlier lesson about constructing professional emails and suggests that Nina take some time before their House Meeting starts.

Agreeing that was the best course of action, Nina finds a lounge space and pulls out her Chromebook. She begins constructing an email to her Chemistry teacher, Mr. Thompson, requesting time to meet with him during today's Acceleration study block. Just as Nina presses "send" on the email, the beginning of the day chimes ring, and she heads to her House Meeting.

The day's House Meeting begins with the usual whole group check-in—each scholar went around identifying one word that described how they feel and naming a goal for the day. Today is her classmate's turn to at the daily "out there" question. Her classmate asks, "if you could have dinner with one famous person, deceased or alive, who would it be, and what would be the outcome?" Their House had answered a similar question from another classmate earlier in the month, but the addendum of an outcome makes Nina push her thinking. By the time the question gets to Nina she is ready with her answer: Robert Smalls and the outcome would be a blueprint for the mindsets necessary to make a change in a world that does not agree with you. Recently, with her upcoming civics internship with the Conservation Voters of SC, Nina has been deeply interested in policy, voters' rights, and political

mindsets to make change.

After everyone shares their answers, Nina's House Leader, Ms. Jones, leads conferences until the bell rings. Nina's conference day is Friday, and she is excited to check in with Ms. Jones about the goals they set last week and her email to Mr. Thompson. She and Ms. Jones first review Nina's grades, although there was limited work incomplete or grades below a B, Ms. Jones began probing Nina on the challenging Chemistry assignment. Reviewing the assignment with Ms. Jones, Nina crafts five questions that would help Nina better understand and complete the assignment.

She and Ms. Jones set a goal to check back in at the end of the day about the day's Acceleration study block and progress toward that assignment. Lastly, Nina and Ms. Jones review Nina's upcoming week, and, with Ms. Jones' support, Nina identifies important study dates and places them on her calendar. With her designed check-in time completed, Nina returns to her seat and continues planning her upcoming week as Ms. Jones met with a few more scholars. Unlike in middle school, in high school House Meeting blocks are one hour instead of 30 minutes. Even though middle school was just two short years ago, Nina really appreciates the additional time to prepare for the day and ensure all assignments are completed.

As the bell sounds at 9:00am, Nina transitions to her first block of the day, Modern World History with Mr. Bailey. Upon arrival to class, Nina readies her learning space—she opened her Chromebook to the Summit Learning Platform (SLP) Dashboard, opens her notebook, and begin the “Do Now” that asks scholars to reflect on their progress towards this semester's project, a Moral Lesson Proposal. Mr. Bailey uses scholars' self-reporting to split scholars into separate groups—with one group working primarily in SLP to complete prerequisite content, one group is Project Planning with Mr. Bailey, one group focused on independent work, and another group being led by the Dr. Cassidy, the Scholar

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Advocate. Because of Nina's progress, she works independently on completing her project, referring to previously completed lessons based on major civilian-based atrocities in the World History course on SLP.

Before class ends, Nina identifies different symbols and analogies in local Gullah Geechee culture that she would incorporate in her lesson to detail the historical precision in the choices she made to teach children to learn these morals.

As the bell rings, Nina transitions to Acceleration. Although scholars can work in unoccupied spaces that work best for them during this study block, Nina makes a beeline to Mr. Thompson to sign up for his Office Hours. Because of her urgency, Nina can meet with Mr. Thompson first, leading the conversation on the support she will need to complete the challenging Chemistry project. The targeted questions she crafted with Ms. Jones were incredibly helpful, and she leaves Mr. Thompsons' office hours feeling prepared to complete them. Nina uses the remainder of the completing the Chemistry assignment and chatting with her friends.

After Acceleration and lunch, Nina heads to Math. Similarly, to History, Nina readies herself by setting up her materials and figuring out the small group she will be in for the day. Because of Nina's progress towards the project, she will begin the class in an exploration group who is responsible for calculating the angles in sweetgrass baskets. Alongside her classmates, Nina applies a variety of geometric formulas to the angular calculations they derived from the baskets. After working collaboratively, Nina rotates to writing a clear mathematical explanation and reflection around their collaborative learning. Because mathematical explanations and reflections are newer to Nina, the math teacher led this group rotation.

Closing the day is Nina's favorite part of the day, Community Engagement! Ms. Mary, the USCB intern,

leads this part of the day. Last week, Ms. Mary presented the problem The Conservation Voters of SC (CVSC) want scholars before their internship, “how do we get rural voters out to vote?” Nina’s class is still learning the facts necessary to answer this question. As such, Nina spends the Community Engagement block with her classmate researching who and what the census constitutes as rural; while other classmates are researching on previous voter engagement efforts. On Monday, Nina is excited to present their findings to the group to get closer to solving CVCS’ problem. Working on this daily makes Nina even more excited to participate in her upcoming internship during Intersession!

Nina checks-out for the day before dismissal by returning to her House and checking in with Ms. Jones. Though it is only a 5-minute check-out, Nina enjoys the last touch point of day before her mom picks up her and her sisters!

Nina’s experience is different from other sixth graders at other schools in a number of ways:

- Before entering school, Nina is inclined to support younger scholars in using the executive function tools (i.e., weekly checklist), highlighting the integration of Sea Islands Heritage Academy’s Core Values in scholars’ everyday lives (**Proactive School Culture**).
- Nina’s relationship with her House Leader, Ms. Jones, is integrated throughout her day and reflects trust and support. This is underscored during the House Meeting where scholars were given the space and opportunity to reflect and plan around their social-emotional state and current goals (**Personalized Learning**).
- Ms. Jones’ check-in with Nina is consistent and supports Nina in advocating for her needs in a class she is struggling in, a skill necessary in school and in life (**Proactive School Culture**). • During all classes, the Blended Learning (BL) routine allows for educator facilitation, as well as scholars to be self-directed through the Summit Learning Platform (SLP). See **Appendix G-17: SLP**

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Project Materials the teacher outline, scholar rubric, and project lesson proposal Nina would be working on (**Personalized Learning**).

- Nina’s completion SLP’s project is both aligned with South Carolina State Standards and is flexible enough to allow for **Place Based Education** (i.e., incorporating Gullah Geechee symbols and analogies in History and sweetgrass basket back in Geometry).
- Through **Personalized Learning** and structural choices to create a **Proactive School Culture** Nina is able to get support similar to that in college through educator Office Hours that are scheduled strategically so that scholars have the opportunity for additional support.
- Acceleration block can be strategically used for scholars who are at-risk of not graduating to complete credit recovery (**Personalized Learning**).
- Small group instruction throughout Sea Islands Heritage Academy allows for scholars to learn in different modes, with Nina using **Place Based Education** of real-life exploration and collaborative thinking to understand the mathematical content (**Personalized Learning**).
- Community Engagement is **Powered by Community**, as it focuses on collaborative problem solving led by USCB interns, teaching Nina around community problem-solving and exposing Nina to current college students.
- Community Engagement prepares scholars for their upcoming Intersession experiences (**Powered by Community**).
- Check-out at the end of the day highlights our **Proactive School Culture** by ensuring begins and ends their day with their primary person.

As described in detail in **Section I. 2a: Instructional Model**, all middle school educators will use our high-quality curricular choices as our foundation. Although all choices are highly vetted, rigorous curricular choice, at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we see the curriculum as the *what* and not the *how*. As such, we will internalize content through a place-based lens. Teacher internalizations will ask teachers to consider place-based resources or assets while prioritizing depth of understanding of the curriculum's assessment, text/concept, and task. Although each curriculum has detailed lesson plans already developed with objectives, standards alignment, materials lists, ways to differentiate learning, and lesson pacing guides already mapped out; the depth of teacher internalization will determine the depth of scholar understanding. As such, Sea Islands Heritage Academy Educator internalization tool will ask educators to think along the following domains while planning for deep learning:

- **Assessment:** How will I show what I've learned? What accountability do I have to illustrate my learning? How does my learning intersect skill, knowledge, and place?
- **Text:** What am I learning? How does it reflect who I am?
- **Task:** How does the way I am learning reflect myself, my heritage, and my community?

Please see **Appendix G-13** for sample internalization tool.

In middle school, each core discipline (grouped by Humanities and STEM) will have a designated team member, Content Lead, by grade level responsible for working alongside the Principal (Executive Director in early years) to determine and revise the projects for History and Science within the core curriculum's framework. As described in Section I.2a.3: Curriculum Choices, the Curriculum Implementation Team (CIT) will be developed post authorizations and continue in perpetuity. We anticipate some members of CIT will be employed at Sea Islands Heritage Academy as educators and

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Content Leads. The team will create, or update scope and sequences informed by Content Leads. Content Leads will lead Content Team Meetings in grade teams to collaboratively lesson plan. Both our yearly and daily schedule allots time for Content Lead planning, support, and facilitation. Ultimately, each classroom educator is responsible for submitting his/her lesson plans by Wednesday at 5:00 p.m. for one week ahead to the principal to review. Furthermore, by Friday 5pm, each classroom is responsible for creating a daily learning block breakdown for scholars, as well as a weekly check list that identifies the upcoming topics and assignments scholars will need to complete (please refer to **Appendix G-9** for example of both items).

Each year, during summer PD, teachers will have time to prepare lesson plans for the first two weeks of school. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, the Principals or Content Leads will provide feedback to teachers on the quality of lesson plans submitted each week and may ask a teacher to resubmit a portion of the lesson plans if they are not deemed to be of sufficient quality.

Lesson planning processes will be influenced by the resources provided by our chosen purchased curriculums, American Reading Company Core, Mid School Math, and Summit Learning Platform (SLP). As described in further detail in **Section I.2d: Virtual Offerings and Section I.2a: Curriculum Choices**, high school students' educators will be supported by a variety of resources in lesson planning and execution as outlined by SLP.

During weekly Data or Lesson Internalization Meetings, teachers will analyze data on a formative previous formative practice and use the action garnered by the data to plan an upcoming lesson. At

these meetings, emphasis will be placed on ensuring that management strategies or adaptations of the curriculum for all students (struggling, SPED, ELL, etc.) are aligned for a unique set of scholars. These meetings emphasize data informed strategies and execution for scholar success. These meetings will also be imperative to determine the dynamic groupings of scholars for the small group lessons.

Section I.2b.16 EDUCATOR DAY-IN-LIFE

Mrs. Page (Typical Teacher Day)

Mrs. Page arrives at 7:00 a.m. After reading the reflections from yesterday's Literary Circle, she decides to print out an article for Kaiden and his group members about The Children's March in Alabama. She may even give her neighbor, Ms. Anita (aka Aunt Pearlie Sue), a call to see if she can talk to that group about how young people in Beaufort have stood up to injustice over the years. Mrs. Page knows that for Place-Based Education to live, she must leverage her community's living legends.

After printing out the article, she returns to their classroom, South Carolina State, to find one of her co teachers, Dr. Mack, has arrived. They greet each other warmly and reflect on the class's enthusiasm that Alice had been named Scholar of the Week during Community Meeting. While chatting, Dr. Mack sets up breakfast and turns on some classical music; Mrs. Page is readying her workstation for the day, putting her House folders on top, and ensuring she's ready for the House meeting. The other educators trickle in as Mrs. Page puts the day's schedule on the projector for scholars.

At 8:15 it's time for the daily staff huddle; Mrs. Page follows the music outside to join the morning huddle. Huddle begins with a "Good Morning Sea Island Heritage," and the team goes around the circle

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with their word of the day. Ms. Jenkins leads a morning practice of redirecting Tier 1 behaviors, and Mr. Joseph reads off the announcements. With a few minutes to spare, Mrs. Page walks over to her morning post at South Carolina State's door.

During arrival, Mrs. Page stands at the doorway of South Carolina State and greets each scholar warmly. She scans the classroom every few scholars to ensure that the room remains a calm, quiet atmosphere. Scholars shuffle out of the classroom at the bell, and the group of students in Mrs. Page's House. Without hesitation, they begin to circle the chairs in the classroom. She notices the other two educators in the room, circling inside the classroom to support scholars as they enter.

After breakfast, Mrs. Page's House transitions to their spot at the U-shaped desks. Here, she leads the morning check-in, allowing each scholar to share their highs and lows. After the morning check-in, Mrs. Page checks-in with two scholars for ten minutes each. The time flies by as she and each scholar review their academic progress report, identify an area of growth, and name one action step to review the following week. Mrs. Page looks up from her conferences to see scholars across the room focused on individual work towards their goals identified during their conferences. After conferring with scheduled students, Mrs. Page facilitates scholars in naming a goal for the day, and signing off on their schedule. She stands in the doorway as scholars transition out and scholars of South Carolina State transition.

Mrs. Page calls the class to attention when scholars are seated and readies them for class. The first moments are spent readying themselves for the day by writing their daily schedule. After checking scholars' schedules, they head to their designated location for the first lesson rotation. Mrs. Page sets a

3-minute timer as scholars transition to their respective areas. Some scholars work on an online skill building program, some read independently for their Literary Circle, Mrs. Page pulls some scholars for formative practice revision, and Mrs. Cliff, the Student Advocate, pulls scholars for special education services.

Because of her planning, Mrs. Page has already identified achievement groups to access the day's lesson. During the first learning block, Mrs. Page knows she will pull the lower achieving (or Mild-level) scholars from each grade level to review strategies for selecting the best evidence. For her last rotation, she will also work with scholars in revising their written responses to include precise, chunked evidence. Though the curriculum, ARC Core, allows for choice in text, the skills she teaches in all three morning lesson rotations reflect their grade-level standards. Mrs. Page sees her 6th, 7th, and 8th grade Mild groups during the morning's learning block.

When class is over, scholars line up for lunch. When scholars exit, Mrs. Page takes a moment to look over scholars' responses. She is impressed with their precise analysis of diction, but she notes a need to focus craft on closing statements. Although she has a prep period during lunch, Mrs. Page decides to have lunch in the cafeteria with her scholars. She knows it's a great opportunity to build relationships with Kendrick and Leslie, two scholars with whom she has been working on building a meaningful relationship.

During the afternoon learning block, middle and high-achieving scholars—her medium and Spicy groups—are combined grade groups focusing on a specific content skill. As she works with a mixed grade-level group, she notices that a scholar in his seat is having difficulty focusing. Instead of immediately addressing the scholar, Marc, Mrs. Page grabs and stands near Marc to discover his struggle. Although he is working on his STEM classwork, Mrs. Page knows that his Individual Learning Plan indicated that he wants to be more focused in STEM class. (He struggles because it's after lunch.) Mrs. Page hopes her proximity will support him in focusing. When she notices that he is off task, she

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refers him to his checklist and asks if he needs additional support. He does not, so Mrs. Page heads back to her small group.

As class wraps up, Mrs. Page hands copies of the Weekly Newsletter to Kaiden to help pass out to his classmates, as scholars are either writing tasks in their planners or grabbing their materials from their cubbies. As the bell rings, scholars transition out to their Community Engagements.

Mrs. Page loves Thursdays because she meets with her coach for her weekly check-in. Before heading to the meeting, Mrs. Page hyperlinks an upcoming lesson in her check-in document. With her coach, they talk about successes Mrs. Page has had during the week; they review observation feedback, name an action step, and discuss the Individual Learning Plans for scholars in her House. After her meeting, Mrs. Page is enthusiastic about updating her calendar to reflect steps towards the progress of her action steps.

When she returns to South Carolina State, Mrs. Page readies her desk for the next day, pulling three scholars' writing practice for tomorrow. Dr. Mack returns from dismissal duty, and Mrs. Page finishes a quick text update to a scholar's parent in her House. She and Dr. Mack sit down to give each other feedback and plan for the following day. After a quick 15-minute chat, Mrs. Page stacks the day's writing assignments, committing to inputting those grades during tomorrow's Community Engagement prep period. It's 4:45, and Mrs. Page is ready to head home for the day, optimistically looking forward to another day at Sea Islands Heritage Academy.

Mrs. Page experience is different from other educators at other schools in a number of ways:

- Mrs. Page begins her day collaborating with her co-teacher on how to best celebrate scholar success (**Proactive School Culture**).
- Mrs. Page has designated time to individually check in with scholars in her House, highlighting **Personalized Learning** and **Proactive School Culture**.
- Mrs. Page has designated time to teach in small groups, identifying and supporting specific scholar needs (**Personalized Learning**).
- With the curricular supports, Mrs. Page can effectively integrate **Place Based Education** with English and place-based history content.
- The longer learning block allows for Mrs. Page scholars to engage in knowledge acquisition (lecture/direct instruction), discussion, independent practice, writing, and revision. The variety of modalities allowed for deep scholar learning to occur (**Proactive School Culture**).
- Mrs. Page embodies a proactive school environment but using a variety of tools to support scholars who may be struggling with meeting behavioral expectations (**Proactive School Culture**).
- Mrs. Page has a consistent, positive, and trusting relationship with her coach; positively receiving professional development that best supports improved scholar learning, highlighting **Personalized Learning** and **Proactive School Culture**.

2c. Professional Development

Section I.2c.17: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OWNERSHIP

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our Academic Leadership Team (ALT) members are instructional guardians of our curriculum and instruction. ALT is responsible for overseeing professional

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development. ALT is led by the Principal (in early years, the Executive Director will serve as Principal) and includes all grade-level Content Leads and the Student Advocate. (**Section I.2c.17**) ALT is responsible for developing high-quality professional development that prioritizes depth of content understanding and evaluates it alongside scholar data. Professional development provides opportunities for academic, administrative staff to model the mindsets, instructional practices, routines, and strategies, as well as intentional relationship building educators will need with scholars. Our systems are rooted in continuous learning and continuous growth.

Section I.2c.18: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMPONENTS

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we are a learning organization. We believe feedback and development make us stronger educators. The Fifth Discipline names learning organizations as places “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.” To achieve this, Peter Senge, MIT Lecturer credited for coining the term, suggested the use of five “component technologies”: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our Professional Development vision encompasses all five component technologies in maintaining high expectations and continuous growth culture. The information below outlines the core components of our school PD programming (**Section I.2c.18**); core components of professional development are described later in this section.

- Summer Orientation:
 - **When:** Before Day 1 of School
 - **Time:** 8 days
 - **Person(s) Responsible:** Executive Director, Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)
- Whole Team PD:
 - **When:** Weekly
 - **Time:** 2 hours/week; Intersessions, 9 days
 - **Person(s) Responsible:** Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)
- Data Analysis Meetings:
 - **When:** Bi-weekly
 - **Time:** 1 hr/ every other week
 - **Person(s) Responsible:** Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)
- Lesson Study Meetings:
 - **When:** Bi-weekly
 - **Time:** 1 hr/every other week
 - **Person(s) Responsible:** Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)
- Content Team Meetings:
 - **When:** Bi-weekly
 - **Time:** 1 hr/ every other week
 - **Person(s) Responsible:** Content Level Leaders (Principal oversees)
- Grade Team Meetings:
 - **When:** Bi-weekly
 - **Time:** 1 hr/ every other week
 - **Person(s) Responsible:** Grade Level Leaders (Principal oversees)

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- Individual Coaching:
 - **When:** Weekly
 - **Time:** 1 hr/ week
 - **Person(s) Responsible:** Academic Coaches (Principal oversees)
- Data Days:
 - **When:** Scheduled below
 - **Time:** 4 days
 - **Person(s) Responsible:** Executive Director, Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)
- Other PD Days:
 - **When:** Scheduled below
 - **Time:** 13 days
 - **Person(s) Responsible:** Executive Director, Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)

Component	When	Time	Persons Responsible
Summer Orientation	Before Day 1 of school	8 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Executive Director ● Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)

Whole Team PD	Every Week	2 hrs/ Week	● Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)
	Intersessions	9 Days	
Data Analysis Meetings	Bi-Weekly (alternating weeks)	1 hr/ Week	● Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)
Lesson Study Meetings			
Content Team Meetings	Bi-Weekly (alternating weeks)	1 hr/ Week	● Content Level Leaders (Principal oversees)
Grade Level Meetings			● Grade Level Leaders (Principal oversees)
Individual Coaching	Weekly	1 hr/ Week	● Academic Coaches (Principal oversees)
Data Days	Scheduled Below	4 Days	● Executive Director ● Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)
Other PD Days	Scheduled Below	13 Days	● Executive Director ● Academic Leadership Team (Principal oversees)

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As illustrated above, the core programming components (**Section 1.2c.18**) of our professional development at Sea Islands Heritage Academy are (1) individual coaching, (2) Summer Orientation, (3) Whole School PD, and (4) Collaborative planning time. Each component is described below:

- **Individual Coaching:** As in everything we do at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we make professional development decisions using our educators' data. Using classroom observations and student work as a primary source of data, our Academic Coaches will align educator success and growth to our **Appendix G-14: Instructional Development Rubric (IDR)**. Using evidence from our Instructional Development Rubric, our Academic Coaches will determine areas of strengths and growth for educators based on their IDR. Educators will be developed alongside 5 development domains:
 - **Student Engagement:** Are all students engaged in the work of the lesson from start to finish?
 - **Academic Ownership & Demonstration of Learning:** Are students supported in taking responsibility for their own learning?
 - **Equitable & Accessible Classrooms:** How are you inviting and providing for all learners in this classroom?
 - **Essential Content:** Does the content being taught meet the rigor of the grade level

standard?

- **Classroom Culture:** Are all students safe to focus on learning and enjoying the learning experience?

Personalized learning is a non-negotiable element at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, and that expectation also holds for our educators. Depending on educators' needs, their coach may identify a single domain to focus on for a set amount of time or even a single row in a domain.

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, if a teacher is proficient or accomplished in these five categories, all scholars in their classroom will have improved opportunities to learn. Through focusing our individual coaching on these domains, educators have a shared vision for instructional success and clear, shared language on how to get there. All professional development sessions, coaching, and feedback are developed in alignment with our IDR. The IDR allows Sea Islands Heritage Academy to have a shared language around development. The IDR system allows educators to see their growth alongside others and to understand the precise actions that will lead to more effective instruction.

The Executive Director will act as Principal and directly coach a set of teachers upon opening. Each grade, however, will have a Humanities and STEM Lead who are also classroom teachers. These teachers will be recruited and hired for their expertise in the content area and experience with grade-level scholars. As Sea Islands Heritage Academy grows, the Principal will coach the Leads, and the Leads will be responsible for coaching a set of Teacher Assistants. Our daily schedule provides at least two 45-minute preps for our educators daily. All coaches will use prep time provided to coach teachers.

- **Summer Orientation (Section I.2c.19):** Before our school's opening, staff will engage in professional development every year for seven days. During this induction period, we will use this time strategically to build trust in the coaching relationship and support teachers to deeply

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understand the mission, values, beliefs, and practices at Sea Islands Heritage Academy. All Sea Islands Heritage Academy staff will attend a yearly retreat to support educators before school opens. Over 2.5 days (part of the seven days of Summer Orientation), educators will take an active learning position to deeply understand what it means to **honor the gifts of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor**, led by a variety of community partner organizations. During this time, professional development provided by the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor will be provided, as well as by Second Founding of America: Reconstruction Beaufort and the Penn Center to support educators' deep knowledge of the place and its history. Research Policy Institute's Research Brief on Effective Professional Development names active learning as development that provides teachers with opportunities to get hands-on experience designing and practicing new teaching strategies. Many Place-Based practices and methods may be as fresh and unfamiliar to our staff as our scholars. Our yearly retreat creates the conditions by which educators are profoundly prepared for this unique aspect of our curriculum and instructional methods. During our annual retreats, educators will review our non-negotiable elements and strategies, and practices to address them (i.e.: **personalized learning:** co-teaching strategies, scholar mentorship practices; **place-based instruction:** Gullah Geechee history, curriculum understanding, and best practices, interdisciplinary best practices; **proactive school environment:** House System, PBIS best practices; **powered by community:** introduction to local community partners).

Through the innovation of our yearly calendar, we will use summer orientation as the scheduled

time to lay the foundation of academic excellence, purposeful relationships, and Gullah Geechee heritage necessary for us to function as a Place-Based school. During this time, educators will learn our beliefs around school culture and climate and ground those beliefs in our taxonomies. Borrowing heavily from the Getting Better Faster framework at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, a strong foundation in classroom management practices is necessary to provide scholars and educators with a shared vision of classroom and school excellence. Although this content will be delivered in summer orientation, it is reinforced in Whole Team PD and weekly individual coaching throughout the school year.

Throughout the Summer Orientation experience, session leaders will be modeling instructional techniques and strategies and creating space for participants to practice throughout sessions. The Research Brief cites modeling as an effective method as it “supports teachers’ ability to ‘see’ what good practices look like and implement new strategies in their classrooms.” All professional development will reflect Sea Islands Heritage Academy’s vision of strong classrooms. Studies have shown that for inquiry-based schools which contain components of PBE, an educator’s fundamental belief about the programming and its effectiveness is key to educator success and improved scholar achievement.³⁴ Pairing the practical tool of modeling with ample time to align with Heritage Academy’s mission, vision, and values, our teachers will be uniquely positioned and prepared to achieve our mission.

- **Whole-Team PD:** Our weekly abbreviated schedule provides the time in our week for us to step back, refine our shared vision of success, and develop alongside that. Our weekly scheduled professional development gives us time to address whole-school trends, refine our socioemotional practices, and collaborate alongside colleagues. The trends (academic or cultural) will be identified by ALT based on qualitative (observational data) and quantitative data (formative and summative practices). The Principal (or member of ALT) will deliver professional development

³⁴<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED564044>

that positions scholars to explore, reflect on, and practice a new skill.

Content and Grade Team Meetings provide **collaborative planning time (Section I.2c.21)**. This time will be led by either Content or Grade Team Leads, under the supervision of the Principal. This time will be spent either learning or reflecting on a new skill or strategy, evaluating its effectiveness, or practicing its execution. This collaborative time is key to the success of our scholars, as it will allow educators to understand scholars’ academic progression.

Appendix G-15, Figure 23 is an outline of our weekly professional development schedule on our abbreviated days.

Figure 23: Wednesday Professional Development Schedule				
	2:00-2:20	2:30-3:15	3:30-4:15	4:15-5:00
Week 1	Survey, Welcome Circle, Announcements	Trend PD	Content Team	Worktime/ Meetings
Week 2			Grade Team	

Our commitment to professional development is evident in the academic calendar, where 266 hours have been strategically placed to allow for collaboration, strengthening content knowledge and pedagogy, and reflecting on test results to develop plans for student improvement. Knowing the diverse needs of scholars in our target area, the intensive strategies, practices, and collaboration necessary require training, support, and continuous progress monitoring. These measures must be kept from a quick lunch meeting or added after school when teachers should be home with their families. We must create a space in the school day and academic calendar.

Section I.2c.21 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

Sea Islands Heritage Academy will regularly seek to improve its professional development program based on staff needs, as evidenced by student assessment data, in-classroom observations, and school walk throughs. On an annual basis, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will evaluate the overall effectiveness of the school’s professional development program. This evaluation will include data from our twice-per-year staff surveys (specifically asking staff to rate the effectiveness of PD), our student achievement data disaggregated by sub-group, individual session survey feedback (including PD provided by external partners), and our overall teacher performance as measured by Instructional Development Rubric as described above. In the third quarter of each year, the Executive Director and the leadership team will use this data to formally discuss the effectiveness of the professional development program and make improvements to our professional development program for the next academic year.

Section I.2c.22 PROFESSIONAL STRUCTURE AND GUIDANCE

Our yearly calendar and strategically placed abbreviated days allow educators to have a thoughtfully

68 planned scope of development that aligns with both scholars and educators' needs. An educator at Sea Islands Heritage Academy can expect 280 hours of professional development yearly (**Section I.2c.20**), in addition to Weekly Check-Ins, Data and Lesson Internalization Meetings, and Value Walkthroughs. **Appendix G-16, Figure 22** below illustrates how the school calendar and daily schedule (early release Wednesdays) will help facilitate sufficient time to conduct, review, a professional guide development (**Section I.2c.22**):

Figure 22: FY25 PD Schedule			
PD Category	Hours	FY25 Dates	Anticipated Professional Development Content
Summer Orientation	8	1-Jul	Retreat: Org Values, Beliefs, Educational Model (PBE), Non-Negotiable Elements
	8	2-Jul	
	8	3-Jul	
	8	8-Jul	Culture Systems, including SEL and Special Pops

	8	9-Jul	Operations and Classroom Set Up
	8	10-Jul	Instruction Day (Unit) Curriculum Overview (led by Curriculum providers—ARC Core, MidSchool Math, and SLP)
	8	11-Jul	Instruction Day 2 (Lesson)
	8	12-Jul	Day 1 Walkthrough & Team Building
Predetermined PD Days	8	30-Sep	6 Week Culture Step back
	8	2-Oct	Data Day & Whole School PD
	8	4-Oct	Unit Internalization
	8	9-Oct	Grade Level Culture Planning (Conferences)

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	8	10-Oct	Content Level Planning Day
	8	11-Oct	
	8	6-Jan	Culture & Values Reset
	8		Data Step back & State Exam Roll Out
	8	17-Mar	Data Step back
	8	18-Mar	
	8	19-Mar	Grade Level Academic Planning (Conferences)
	8	20-Mar	

	8	21-Mar	Content Level Planning Day
	8	24-Mar	Content Level Planning Day
	8	25-Mar	Grade Level Culture Planning (Conferences)
	8	5-Jun	Data Step back & Reflection
	8	6-Jun	Closeout
Weekly PD	84	Wednesdays	42 Wednesday PD Days (84 hours @ 2 hr/week)
Total	266		

Aside from Professional Development provided by school-based leadership, **Appendix X: Five Year Budget** illustrates that we have budgeted on average \$1350 per full time employee for professional development. This will allow educators to explore professional development opportunities outside our school that would enhance their understanding of our educational programming.

Professional development will be reviewed through school-develop surveys around professional

70 development execution and application.

2d. Virtual Offerings (n/a)

Although we do not plan to have <75% of instruction virtual at any given point, considering the recent history of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it is necessary to address possible means for the need for virtual instruction.

As described in **Section I.2a: Instructional Model**, high school students enrolled at Sea Islands Heritage Academy will learn in a blended environment—with some courses being taken online and some classes will be taught live. Although not wholly virtual, the flexibility of the curriculum is essential to note in our current climate. Because of the challenges COVID-19 presents in delivering high-quality instruction, despite the medium, at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we find importance in naming the virtual flexibilities our curriculum offers.

Sea Islands Heritage Academy will apply to become a Summit Learning Platform (SLP) partner upon approval. As described above, SLP offers schools a customizable online curriculum, various educational resources and technology tools, professional development for educators, and ongoing coaching and support. As named on their website, The Summit Learning program supports over 80,000 students, 4,000 educators, and nearly 400 schools across the U.S.

Scholars at Sea Islands Heritage Academy will be expected to attend school Monday through Friday. As described in detail in **Section I.3b: Educational Structure** and **Appendix F School Calendar and Daily Schedule**, high school scholars will have ample time to both receive “live” instruction. In fact, their website names:

The Summit Learning Platform does not replace teachers or face-to-face instruction. There is no set amount of screen time. Instead, students are empowered to use the Platform as a tool to support their learning, enabling them to access content in a way that meets their learning style and showing them their progress towards their goals. With the platform, teachers have complete access to see how their students are performing on a daily basis and use that data to personalize instruction and provide additional support through mentoring and coaching.

In each learning block, scholars will spend <75% learning via SLP and 25% of the learning block receiving live instruction. Contingent upon the course, scholars will either receive live instruction via whole group direct instruction, seminar-style discussion, or small-group instruction (**Section I.4.26**).

With SLP, scholars are supported by a rigorous standards-aligned curriculum, construct knowledge and lead their own learning while achieving three core learning outcomes—Cognitive Skills, Content Knowledge (aligned to grade-level standards), and Habits of Success. Summit Learning Platform curriculum is assessed through the Cognitive Skills Rubric and aligns to South Carolina State Standards. Contingent upon the course, scholars will either receive live instruction via whole group direct instruction, seminar-style discussion, or small-group instruction (**Section I.4.26**). As further described:

The Summit Learning Cognitive Skills Rubric is an assessment and instruction tool that outlines the continuum of skills that are necessary for college and career readiness. Cognitive Skills are interdisciplinary skills that require higher order thinking and application, such as Making Connections and Inferences and Evaluating Arguments. The rubric includes 36 skills and 8 score

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levels applicable to students in grades 3 through 12. Through Summit Learning, students practice and develop Cognitive Skills in every subject and in every grade level. The use of a common analytic rubric for assessment of project-based learning allows for targeted, standards-aligned feedback to students and supports the development of key skills over time.

Please find complete rubric in **Appendix G-12 Summit Learning Platform Cognitive Skills Rubric**, as well as a list of developed courses, **Appendix I Virtual Course Offerings (Section I.2d.24)**; and one course at the high school level that can be previewed by the SCDE to assess depth of work necessary for curricular alignment, **Appendix I Virtual Course Offerings (Section I.2d.25)**. Complete curricular access will be available to SCDE by April 2023. Because blended learning represents Heritage Academy’s optimal high school learning environment, we will have the partnership with SLP thoroughly outlined significantly before the start of our high school the 2025-2026 school year (**Section I.4.27**).

When considering how much educator interaction scholars will receive within the online instruction (**Section I.4.28**) SLP’s website outlines:

Teachers have instant access to see how their students are performing and use that information to provide individualized, small group, and whole-class supports. The technology allows teachers to be more specific and strategic with their time and provide materials to individual students at a pace and level of rigor that best meets their needs.

Because the Platform supports students to become self-directed learners, using it often causes both teachers and students to rethink their approach to the classroom experience. And though the Platform supports students' learning experiences, teachers remain firmly at the heart of it. Learning is a human experience, and no software tool should try to change that.

We firmly believe at Sea Islands Heritage Academy that live instruction is irreplaceable; as such, when selecting SLP as our online portal is one that affirms that choice. A key feature of SLP is the integration of 1:1 mentoring. This mentoring requires partner schools, like Sea Islands Heritage Academy, to have four core teachers per grade level, and by ensuring our 15:1 ratio, all blended learning remains personalized. Moreover, Sea Islands Heritage Academy plans to comply with S.C. Code Ann. 59-40-50 by securing 75% of teachers are certified and meet SC standards. With the platform, teachers can see how their students perform daily and use that data to personalize instruction and provide additional support through mentoring and coaching. Teachers can adapt or create new content and Projects to meet their scholars' needs. **(Section I.4.29)** In addition, the Summit Learning partnership provides ongoing support. As such, schools receive one-on-one coaching from a dedicated SLP Success Manager. The Success Manager checks in regularly to discuss school progress and answer questions. As an online tool, the SLP is an LMS platform **(Section I.4.29)**. It allows scholars to set goals and create roadmaps to achieve them, learn content at their own pace, and dive into meaningful projects that connect to the real world.

3. Serving Students with Disabilities and Special Populations

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, all scholars, regardless of need, should recognize **the fullness of their identities and determine, pursue, and succeed in the future of their choice**. We will be a school with open enrollment to any scholar and provide them with a free appropriate public education by offering services to meet a diverse set of needs in the least restrictive environment. At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, educators believe all scholars can learn; that core mindset serves the needs of all scholars. We believe these identified principles—meaningful relationships, problem-solving around individual needs, and blurred academic and social lines—allow for the foundation by which a diverse set of learners can access deep learning.

- **Meaningful Relationships:** As **Proactive School Culture** is a non-negotiable element at Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we see families as our key partner in achieving scholar success, this is particularly true in supporting scholars with disabilities. Upon approval, we will create protocols to support family communication and advocacy, as well as create policies to ensure that family communication is projected to be completed by October 2023. Please see **Appendix T Draft Discipline Policy** for philosophical expectations that will contribute to said policies. Creating a “village” around scholars including their families, school administrator, classroom teachers, House leaders, and other necessary staff members positions scholars in a position to advocate for themselves and have their needs met consistently in all spaces of scholars' lives.

- Problem-solving around individual needs: At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our non negotiable element of **Personalized Learning** informs the innovative structural conditions by which all scholars' individual needs are reflected upon frequently, the House System. House Leaders work alongside classroom teachers to develop an Individual Learning Plan for each scholar in their House. This structure, core to our programming, provides the opportunity for problem-solving to be routinized. As shared in a recent paper studying charter schools that are getting results educating children with disabilities, schools with the best results “didn't think about educating students with disabilities in terms of predetermined programs or services. Instead, they crafted programs of support around each student and continually re-evaluated them.” At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, our escalation of support beginning with our House System creates an environment where problem-solving around individual needs is at our core.

- Blurred Lines (Inclusive Setting): Blurring the lines when teaching scholars with disabilities and students with special needs, such as language development, means creating an inclusive classroom that does not allow a person to feel excluded for their learning differences. In all grades (6-12), all scholars will learn in the least restrictive classroom as much as possible with support brought into the classroom and pull out limited to times informed by an IEP. In middle school, all scholars will learn in the least restrictive, self-contained classroom. This means that scholars will be learning, across all disciplines, with the same teachers and the same group of students. This model, often seen in primary grade levels and phased into a departmentalized structure for secondary, offers the educator the opportunity to gain a deep understanding of each scholar's needs. A multiage, self-contained classroom with multiple educators creates the opportunity for integrated co-teaching (ICT) models to be used throughout all instruction. Students with and without disabilities or special needs learn together, promoting inclusivity and diversity when ensuring all students are provided with a continuum of services to achieve state standards. Additionally, the high-impact **Place-Based Educational Framework** by which we operate at Sea Islands Heritage Academy allows educators to deeply consider the ways in which

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scholars engage, creating age-appropriate and positive social interactions. In an ICT classroom, high engagement is prioritized so that relationships are leveraged thoughtfully and strategically to support scholar growth while blurring the social and academic lines.

The mindsets above guide our practices in serving all scholars.

Section I.3.1: SERVING DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Based on review of Beaufort County's most recent student data, there are approximately 18% of students with disabilities. A further breakdown of the types of disabilities of students with disabilities in Beaufort County is below:

- Educable Mentally Handicapped: 1%
- Learning Disabled: 64%
- Trainable Mentally Handicapped: 2%
- Emotionally Handicapped: 2%
- Orthopedically Handicapped: 1%
- Visually Handicapped: <1%
- Autism: 9%
- Hearing Handicapped: 1%

• Speech Handicapped: 18%

Educable Mentally Handicapped	1%
Learning Disabled	64%
Trainable Mentally Handicapped	2%
Emotionally Handicapped	2%
Orthopedically Handicapped	1%
Visually Handicapped	<1%
Autism	9%
Hearing Handicapped	1%
Speech Handicapped	18%

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Based on the special populations identified at the middle school most near Sea Islands Heritage Academy’s anticipated location, 2% of students are identified as high achieving scholars and 3% are identified as scholars with limited proficiency.

Meeting the diverse needs of any special populations:

To accommodate the needs of our special populations, we intend to adopt and implement the Special Education Policies and Procedures as outlined by the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD), including the procedures for:

- Identifying students with special needs
- Offering appropriate evaluation/re-evaluations for special education services
- Developing and implementing Individualized Education Plans (IEP), and 504 Plans (as applicable)
- Ensuring confidentiality
- Encouraging parental participation; and
- Providing Procedural Safeguards for parents.

Special Education students will be provided with programs implemented in accordance with federal, state, and local policies; specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA); Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1993; and South Carolina State Board Regulations 43-243 and 43-243.1. Additionally, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will follow guidelines and procedures detailed in the South Carolina State Department of Education (SCDE), Office of Special Education Services, Special Education Process Guide for South Carolina Manual, found

Section I.3.2: MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL SCHOLARS

At Sea Islands Heritage Academy, we believe in individualized, high-quality academic and behavioral support for all scholars. We not only understand the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), but also a commitment maximizing all scholar learning through targeted, individualized, and data-informed support. As discussed in more detail below, our plans and programs to serve such students will be carefully crafted in partnership with the families involved.

Staffing plan. All academic classes at Sea Islands Heritage Academy will have a 15:1 ratio between students and staff. Maintaining a low educator-to-scholar ratio creates the conditions by which educators can identify and support a diverse population of scholar need. Starting in the spring of our pre-opening year and in the following years, we will employ a Student Advocate to serve as a Special Educator Coordinator, described in **Section I.2a: Instructional Model** and **Appendix J: Job Descriptions**. The Student Advocate will support the school in all matters related to special education, our RTI program, gifted students, and all ELL programming and services issues. Starting in Year 1 of operation, Sea Islands Heritage will employ one certified in Special Education in each grade band. We are confident that with this staffing structure, we will ensure special education students' needs are met by their IEPs. We will contract with licensed related service providers (e.g., speech-language therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists) based on students' service needs in their IEPs. The school will contract with a school psychologist from Day 1 of operation. During Year 2, we will hire one interventionist.

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Ideally, the interventionist will also hold an endorsement(s) related to gifted learners. Each will work for 25 hours a week for 40 total weeks; the interventionist will provide support during classroom instruction and rotate as needed. Further, we will hire teachers committed to every student's success and provide before and/or after-school tutoring to students in need of support beyond that received during the school day, ensuring this is the case by providing professional development to support all scholars' needs.

Daily Schedule. In designing our daily schedule, we took great care to ensure that it affords the time needed to provide all students, including those with special needs, equal opportunity to learn and achieve. As outlined in **Section I.2b: Educational Model**, we will implement a year-round calendar and allocate ample daily learning blocks to develop foundational literacy and numeracy skills and actively engage scholars in mastering state standards. We are committed to meeting every student's unique, diverse learning needs. As such, our open, concept- multiage classrooms create the conditions where educators teach primarily in small groups. This innovative approach prioritizes differentiated instruction for all scholars. Accordingly, all general education teachers will receive training and support around, and will be required to use, multiple instructional formats and modalities, employ small-group instruction, make accommodations, provide modifications, apply interventions, differentiate instruction, implement remediation, and practice sheltered instructional strategies during all core instruction, as needed and as appropriate. Additionally, all students, including those with special needs, will receive small group instruction daily. This block flexibility allows scholars to receive intervention, remediation, reinforcement, and/or enrichment. This block allows all students to receive additional support in the classroom through the interventionist, special education teacher, and/or general education teacher.

Support Strategies. As indicated throughout this narrative, we firmly believe that every student can

learn. We are committed to providing an environment that ensures every student receives the instruction, interventions, services and supports s/he needs to achieve academic success. If it is determined that a student's needs require expertise beyond that of our staff and/or the instruction, intervention, supports, and services provided during core instruction and the flex block are not adequate, we will contract the services of external providers. We are committed to educating every enrolled student, including those with extensive needs that require significant support and services. Such services may include occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language therapy.

Section I.3.3 Continuum of Services in Least Restrictive Environments

Students with disabilities may receive their mandated services and/or needed interventions in small groups during this block (to the maximum extent possible), which ensures students are educated in the **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Section I.4.3)** alongside their peers whenever possible. All scholars can access schoolwide educational, extra-curricular, and culture-building activities regardless of academic need. Furthermore, we will implement an MTSS framework to identify and provide a continuum of services. For scholars needing additional assistance, other times in the day (House Meetings and Community Engagement) allow for scholars to receive all necessary services. Students with disabilities would only be pulled out of the general education setting if their Individualized Education Program (IEP) calls for specially designed instruction outside the classroom to support better their academic, behavioral, and/or social-emotional learning needs. The services and interventions received during Community Engagement time or the Learning Block with individualized instruction reinforce the skill development teachers provide during core instruction. To ensure that the time seamlessly dovetails with core instruction, general education teachers and special education staff will be expected to communicate and collaborate about content and instruction regularly. At the same time,

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we are confident that core instructional time and the flexible block will meet our students' needs and provide sufficient time and individualization to meet our students' needs. We will modify students' schedules if it is determined that they are not satisfactorily receiving required services and/or meeting goals documented in their IEPs.

Sea Islands Heritage Academy will have a standardized process for identifying students with disabilities, one that seeks to identify, not misidentify or over-identify students. As described in **Section I.2a: Instructional Model**, Sea Islands Heritage Academy has a universal screening tool and established the RTI process for meeting the needs of struggling learners. Sea Islands Heritage Academy collects regular data on student progress and has an established process for monitoring student progress through our House System, as outlined in **Section I.2a: Instructional Model**.

If a student fails to demonstrate academic and/or behavioral progress, the school may make a referral for special education evaluation that is grounded in a scholar's data. Consistent with one of our core beliefs, **families are our key partners**, Sea Islands Heritage Academy will also ensure that parents are familiar with their rights under the law to request an evaluation of their scholar. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will share evaluation request rights at the family orientation session at the start of each school year and provide information in the Student Family Handbook. A copy of a sample Sea Islands Heritage Academy referral for special education form is found in **Appendix G-18 Special Education Referral Form (adapted from the NY Dept of Education but will use a sponsor's form if preferred or required)**. Parents may request a pre-evaluation conference to talk with Sea Islands Heritage Academy staff members about any potential concerns and will be as transparent as possible about what kinds of assessments may be used in the evaluation and who will conduct the assessments. Parents must provide informed written consent for the evaluation to begin. Each student is entitled to receive appropriate and comprehensive

evaluations. The evaluation will examine all areas of a scholar's suspected disability. Once evaluations have been performed and results are received, an eligibility meeting is convened with the scholar's parents/guardians, the Special Advocate, the scholar's primary teacher, and any other relevant Sea Islands Heritage Academy staff members. A decision is then made as to the student's eligibility for special education services. If the student is eligible, an IEP is developed. For a sample list of accommodations for scholars with IEPs, please see **Appendix G-19 IEP Accommodation List**. Much of the information of the continuum of services in the Least Restrictive Environment is below described in detail in **Section I.2b: Education Structure**, at Sea Islands Heritage Academy these services may include, but are not limited to (**Section I.3.3**):

- Consultant teacher services (direct and/or indirect contract support for an individual or group of scholars)
- Related services (includes, but not limited to speech-language pathology, audiology services • Interpreting services, psychological services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling services, orientation, and mobility services) • Integrated co-teaching (general education teacher and SPED teacher and/or Student Advocate present to provide scholar services and support)
- Resource room and self-contained option if needed (for scholars in need of specialized supplementary instruction in an individual or small group setting for a portion of the school day, scholars move from their general education classroom to a separate space for instruction)
- PE adaptations (specially designed programs of developmental activities, games, sports, and rhythms suited to students with disabilities who may not safely or successfully engage in the regular physical education program)

For scholars with new IEPs or existing IEPs, each scholar's IEP is reviewed at least once every school year. In addition to an annual review of the IEP, special reviews will be held if there are concerns with a student's progress or if the parent or team want to discuss the IEP. We believe that scholars with

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disabilities can achieve at high levels, and we will ensure that each scholar has the necessary support in place to achieve. The school's Student Advocate will also serve as the Section 504 Coordinator. Section 504 requires public schools to provide students with disabilities with appropriate accommodations and modifications to ensure that students are not discriminated against based on their disability.

If a scholar has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, they may be eligible for Section 504 accommodations. That is to say, students experiencing difficulty in the classroom and for whom there is suspicion of a disability should initially be referred to the Scholar Advocate. School staff will then follow all established procedures and determine if it is appropriate to refer the student for possible 504 Plan services.

The eligibility/ineligibility is based on a variety of sources. 504 Eligibility sources may include educator observations, information from parents, information from medical providers, standardized test scores, grades, or other pertinent information. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will schedule a Section 504 meeting to determine eligibility. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will refer to IDEA laws in regard to students with potential 504 plans. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will maintain responsibility all aspects of scholars' IEP, 504's and ELL scholars, including staffing, expenses, accommodations, etc. Parents will receive notice of the Section 504 meeting and be invited to attend. Parents and students will be encouraged to attend the meeting and provide input that will help the Support Team in making decisions. Section 504 teams that convene for annual meetings should consist of the parents, the student, the school administrator or designee, and school personnel who are familiar with the student, such as the student's House Leader, educator, or counselor. Sea Islands Heritage Academy will seek guidance and assistance from the SCPCSD on 504 eligibility determinations by requesting the availability of the SCPCSD staff to schedule a Section 504 eligibility meeting and, as eligibility/ineligibility is based

on a variety of sources, determining which sources will be needed to assist in meeting eligibility and obtain them for the meeting.

Section I.3.4: PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SEA ISLANDS HERITAGE ACADEMY AND PROPOSED

SPONSOR

We look forward to our partnership with the SCPCSD and the guidance that they will provide regarding education best practices. With respect to special education, we believe collaboration is key. As such we anticipate and welcome their ability to

- Provide Special Education training and ensure quality Special Education service delivery in schools
- Monitor our school's performance according to the performance goals for its particular model and the District's School Performance Framework (SPF)
- Facilitate background checks and ensure teacher certification requirements
- Ensure that Sea Islands Heritage Academy is properly safeguarding the confidentiality of student information
- Ensure that Sea Islands Heritage Academy is properly adhering to the safeguards that relate to parents remaining fully informed of all actions being proposed or refused regarding their child's education plan. This includes receiving "prior written notice" as defined by IDEA.

The school will maintain the responsibility to: