Outcomes Sought with Focus Areas: A Resource for Grantseekers

The purpose of this document is to provide grantseekers with an idea of the types of outcomes The Belk Foundation is interested in supporting. It is not meant to be comprehensive, but should provide a starting point for a discussion as your organization assesses potential alignment with Belk Foundation priorities or prepares for a final application submission.

We understand that there are many approaches to evaluation. Few organizations have the capacity or wherewithal to have elaborate, scientific, randomized control trials - while valuable, these are certainly not our expectation for all grantees. Some organizations may have the ability to engage a third party evaluator, and others may use in-house staff to track progress through a standard assessment tool or performance management system. We are interested in hearing your process and recognize that many factors (including budget, organizational lifecycle, and program complexity) are considered when determining an organization's approach.

Regardless of an organization's evaluation method, we are interested in evaluation used for learning and continuous program improvement, rather than solely compliance and reporting.

The Belk Foundation has two areas that it is interested in supporting:

- **K-3 Achievement:** *Increasing the number of children in grades K-3 who achieve on or above grade level in core subjects*
- **Quality Teaching and Leading:** *Increasing quality teaching and leading in K-12 public schools*

Below we have outlined the types of outcomes in which we are most interested in investing for each focus area. The field of education is transforming rapidly, which makes it difficult to provide an exhaustive list of acceptable outcomes. Ultimately, we hope to engage in a dialogue with grantseekers about their approach and use of data, how they attempt to understand whether they are making a difference, and the basis for their theory of change.

K-3 Achievement: *Increasing the number of children in grades K-3 who achieve on or above grade level in core subjects*

While often controversial, a student's performance on standardized tests is correlated to future life outcomes, including job attainment and earning potential. Because test scores provide a baseline from which to compare students and programs, their implementation and use is essential. But what we are most interested in evaluating is the *growth* of a particular student or group of students, not just one score. Growth-based measures provide more meaningful analysis, controlling for factors such as starting ability and previous instruction that cannot be measured or accounted for through raw proficiency scores.[1] These student test scores should be supplemented with other sources of data (formative testing, attendance rates, program evaluations, performance-based tasks, etc.) so programs and The Belk Foundation can focus on improving student achievement.[2] When it comes to student achievement, we are most

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[1] Dahlin, Michael, and John Cronin. "Achievement Gaps and the Proficiency Trap." Kingsburycenter.org. Jan. 2010. Northwest Evaluation Association. <http://www.kingsburycenter.org/sites/default/files/achievement-gaps-and-the-proficiency-trap.pdf>.

[2] For guidance on balance of data points, see Manno, Bruno V. A Road to Results: A Performance Measurement Guidebook. Publication. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007. Annie E. Casey Foundation's Education Program.

interested in investing in organizations and programs that collect and analyze data on an individual student basis, with an aim towards individualizing instruction to best meet a student's needs.

The following are suggested data points for grantseekers:

- Grantees should use *summative* and/or *formative* outcomes when assessing their effect on student achievement.

  - **Summative Outcomes** are typically course or year-end assessments. They are broadly broken into two categories:

    - Norm-Referenced Tests – These tests measure instructional standards that are common throughout all of the United States. These tests measure a student's performance against a group of students who have already taken the test, the "normed group," and are intended show differences among the nation's students. Often these test report scores as a percentage and percentile ranks, not a raw score or an achievement level.[3] Examples of Norm-Reference Tests include:
      - Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED)
      - Stanford Achievement Test
      - Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT)
      - Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS and Terra Nova)
      - California Achievement Test (CAT)
      - Tests of Academic Proficiency (TAP)
      - ACT Aspire

    - Criterion-Referenced Tests – These tests differ from norm-referenced tests in that they measure how students acquired the skills outlined in a prescribed curriculum. These tests are created by the states to assess standards set forth by the state. These tests often report scores as either a raw score or an achievement level. Examples of a Criterion-Reference Test include the NC READY End of Grade (EOG) Test in North Carolina.

  - **Formative Outcomes** offer a means for meeting goals and showing growth in student achievement. Acceptable formative assessments include, but are not limited to:
    - Criterion-reference tests or norm-referenced tests
    - Diagnostic assessments such as Aimsweb Test of Early Literacy, DIBELS, Development Reading Assessment (DRA), i-Ready, and Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test

- Additional measures can be used to supplement summative and formative data. Some of these data points for these factors may include the following:

  - Attendance Measures including daily attendance logs, participation logs, and other appropriate measurements of attendance. Research has shown that factors

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[3] "Norm-Referenced Achievement Tests." The National Center for Fair & Open Testing. 17 Aug. 2007. 11 July 2013 <http://www.fairtest.org/facts/nratests.html>.

such as chronic absence can be detrimental to a child's literacy and math skill development. [4]
- o Program evaluations by teachers, parents, and students.
- o Student Behavior measures including engagement and attitude[5] and disciplinary actions such as suspensions.
- o Performance-based Assessments – Tasks, projects, or writing samples that access students' advanced and authentic thinking skills and abilities and are evaluated with a rubric. These assessments are activities that require students to create, construct, or produce a product.[6]

<u>Quality Teaching and Leading</u>: *Increasing quality teaching and leading in K-12 public schools*

Teachers are the most important in-school influence on student achievement. Research has shown that "students taught by highly effective teachers for three consecutive years can outscore students who had poor quality instructors over the same period by as much as 50 percentile points." Research also shows that school leaders are critical, especially when it comes to retaining quality teachers. School leaders create and foster an environment for great teaching and learning.

<u>The ultimate outcome that we are interested in seeing with our investments in teachers and leaders is growth in student achievement</u>. We understand that measuring precisely the effect an adult educator has on an individual student's achievement is complex. While we appreciate the challenge, we also acknowledge that the complexity does not eradicate the value in doing so.

We are interested in investing in high-performing, outcomes-oriented, sustainable programs and strategies that contribute to the following goals for teachers and leaders:

- ▪ Recruit the most qualified candidates into the profession
- ▪ Develop current professionals so that they can improve their ability to help students achieve
- ▪ Retain the highest performing professionals

Recruitment and retention measurements should be fairly straightforward, but what can be challenging is the determination of what makes the educator the "most qualified" or "highest performing". We believe that there should be many measures that assess whether someone is "qualified" or "performing" (including student achievement assessments). We also believe that any such measures should be evidence- and/or research-based. We are looking for grantees to substantiate why the candidates should be recruited or the educators retained, and will always be looking for a tie to that professional's impact on our ultimate outcome, *student achievement*.

A word on Professional Development: We believe that as adult learners, teachers and leaders should be provided high-quality ways to improve their craft. There are many approaches to professional development programs. In order to guide our assessment of investment

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[4] Balfanz, Robert, and Vaughan Byrnes. <u>The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools</u>. Rep. 2012. Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

[5] Akey, Theresa M. "Context, Student Attitudes and Behavior, and Academic Achievement." Jan. 2006. MDRC. <www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_519.pdf>.

[6] Darling-Hammond, Linda, and Frank Adamson. <u>Beyond Basic Skills: The Role of Performance Assessment in Achieving 21st Century Standards of Learning</u>. Rep. 2010. Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

opportunities, we consider the Standards for Professional Learning, developed by Learning Forward.

Standards for Professional Learning

- <u>Learning Communities</u>: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.
- <u>Leadership</u>: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.
- <u>Resources</u>: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.
- <u>Data</u>: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.
- <u>Learning Designs</u>: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.
- <u>Implementation</u>: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long term change.
- <u>Outcomes</u>: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.