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Application Narrative

The American educational landscape has shifted dramatically in recent years, driven by increased linguistic and demographic diversity, widespread adoption of evidence-based literacy instruction (EBLI), and increasing emphasis on systematic adoption of effective instructional programs. Students who are English learners (ELs) continue to increase across the United States and in Maryland, the site of this project (NCES, 2024). These students bring new strengths to their communities while also creating a compelling need for schools to offer appropriate support and rigorous instruction. To offer these ELs the full promise of the American dream, it is essential to provide them high-quality instruction that responds to their unique linguistic and literacy needs (Baker et al., 2014) and prepares them for future learning and success (Blitz, 2025; National Center on Improving Literacy, 2025).

To provide such high-quality instruction, teachers of ELs must have a strong knowledge base, the ability to support schoolwide adoption of evidence-based practices, and the knowledge to appropriately assist those ELs who may need additional support. Continued teaching shortages in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and related fields have heightened the need for educator professional development (PD) and illustrated the essential role of educators for students, schools and society at large (He & Bagwell, 2021). In response to these shortages, increasing numbers of educators are prepared through nontraditional pathways, creating an additional need for programming and PD that are accessible to those in nontraditional as well as traditional preparation pathways (Quezada, 2020).

Taken together, these developments create an urgent need for PD that is accessible to all professionals, focuses on evidence-based literacy and language instruction (EBLI) for ELs, and prepares educators to deliver explicit, systematic literacy instruction while meeting the unique linguistic and academic needs of English learners (ELs). Educators must know current research and have repeated opportunities to practice implementing effective instruction. Research demonstrates that even when evidence-based instruction is implemented, educators need PD to be able to implement it effectively (Vaughn et al., 2009). This requires PD with a strong clinical component, providing educators the opportunity to receive timely and actionable feedback on real-time instructional strategies (Hollins & Warner, 2021). Experienced inservice educators need differentiated preparation that continues to strengthen their conception of evidence-based practices (EBPs) and up-to-date language instruction, while preparing them to serve as teacher-leaders to move their school communities forward. These school communities then serve as incubators of effective practice, providing an environment in which teachers use ongoing professional learning to support their EL students' achievement (Benegas & Stolpestad, 2020).

Project ASCENT (Advancing System Capacity for English Language Teaching), based at the College of Education (COE) at Towson University (TU), the largest preparer of teachers in Maryland, will respond directly to these interrelated needs by preparing preservice and inservice educators to implement EBLI emphasizing explicit academic vocabulary and comprehension development as part of a system-wide approach to PD, in partnership with local school systems. ASCENT provides **high-quality professional development to prepare educators to serve ELs (Absolute Priority 1)** and is grounded in **evidence-based (EB) literacy approaches**

which leverage explicit, systematic vocabulary instruction, purposeful discussion, multimedia teaching and peer learning (**Competitive Preference Priority 1**) (Vaughn et al., 2009; Wen & Naim, 2023). ASCENT is also aligned with State priorities as demonstrated by **support from the Maryland State Department of Education (Competitive Preference Priority 2)**. ASCENT includes **collaboration to develop and implement methods and instruments to measure teachers' pedagogical knowledge to support ELs (Invitational Priority 1)**.

(a) Design: (i) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes are clearly specified, measurable, ambitious yet achievable, and aligned with the purposes of the grant program.

Goals, objectives, and outcomes are clearly specified and measurable as indicated below.

Goal 1: Prepare 93 preservice and early career inservice educators eligible for English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement who can effectively implement EBLI for

ELs. Objective 1.1: Prepare 45 preservice teachers who will complete an 18-credit preservice program with induction addressing language acquisition, EBLI for ELs, and supervised clinical experience. Outcome 1.1a: 45 preservice teachers (15 per cohort) will complete an 18-credit program addressing language acquisition, EBLI, and supervised clinical experience with ELs.

Outcome 1.1b: 45 preservice teachers (15 per cohort) will complete 4 induction workshops focused on EB literacy practices for ELs in year one. Outcome 1.1c: 45 preservice teachers (15 per cohort) will meet requirements for Maryland ESOL endorsement, including ESOL content and reading proficiency. Objective 1.2: Prepare 48 inservice teachers (12 per cohort), with priority for early-career teachers from nontraditional preparation programs, who will complete a 12-credit inservice program addressing language acquisition, EBLI for ELs, and supervised

clinical experience with ELs. Outcome 1.2a: 48 inservice teachers (12 per cohort), with priority for early-career teachers from nontraditional preparation programs, will complete a 12-credit inservice program addressing language acquisition, EBLI for ELs, and supervised clinical experience for ELs. Outcome 1.2b: 48 inservice teachers (12 per cohort), with priority for early-career teachers from nontraditional preparation programs, will meet requirements for Maryland ESOL endorsement, including ESOL content and reading proficiency. Objective 1.3: Incorporate elements of EBLI for ELs, to include a multi-component model focused on explicit instruction in vocabulary, multimedia resources with purposeful discussion, use of writing and graphic organizers for comprehension, and structured peer pairing (Vaughn et al., 2009), across TU preservice coursework, induction and clinical experiences in preservice programs. Outcome 1.3a: EBLI emphasizing the multi-component model (Vaughn et al., 2009) will be integrated into activities, materials and assessments for at least three courses within the six-course preservice Linguistic Diversity program. Outcome 1.3b: EB literacy instruction emphasizing the multi-component model (Vaughn et al., 2009) will be integrated into activities, materials and assessments for at least two required courses within the four-course early-career inservice program. Outcome 1.3c: Clinical practice activities emphasizing implementation of EBLI according to the multi-component model (Vaughn et al., 2009) will be integrated into at least two required preservice and early career inservice courses through simulation and authentic teaching experiences. Outcome 1.3d: Preservice and early-career participants will achieve an average score of at least 2.0 on a 3-point scale on TU's Observation Rubric for EBLI (OR-EBLI) during supervised clinical experiences focused on implementation of the multi-component EB model.

Goal 2: Strengthen knowledge of ESOL, expertise in EBLI for ELs, and leadership capacity of 30 experienced inservice educators to serve ELs along the continuum of needs and gain ESOL endorsement.

Objective 2.1: 30 inservice educators will complete a 36-credit graduate program emphasizing EBLI for English learners with disabilities including reading difficulties for ELs, assessment and identification of ELs with disabilities, and leadership experience. Outcome 2.1a:

30 inservice educators will complete a 36-credit graduate program emphasizing EBLI, reading difficulties for ELs, assessment and identification of ELs with disabilities, and leadership

experience. Outcome 2.1b: 30 inservice teachers will meet Maryland requirements for ESOL

endorsement. Outcome 2.1c: At least 95% of participants completing the graduate program will successfully demonstrate competency in EBLI through program assessments and supervised

clinical experiences. Outcome 2.1d: MEd graduate participants will complete at least two

leadership experiences integrated into the MEd program involving school-based needs assessment and mentoring, coaching, facilitation of professional learning, or instructional

support of colleagues focused on EBLI. Objective 2.2: Towson University will integrate EBLI

(Vaughn et al., 2009) into the MEd in Special Education (ML track) program to support ELs with

and without reading difficulties throughout graduate coursework, leadership preparation, and

clinical experiences. Outcome 2.2a: EBLI emphasizing explicit academic vocabulary

development, structured peer pairing, purposeful discussion and use of multimedia, and writing

and graphic organizers will be integrated into at least 6 required MEd graduate courses.

Outcome 2.2b: At least two clinical experiences emphasizing implementation of EBLI will be

incorporated into graduate coursework through supervised teaching and coaching experiences.

Outcome 2.2c: Graduate participants will achieve an average score of at least 2.0 on a 3-point

scale on TU's TESOL Observation Rubric for EBLI (OR-EBLI) during supervised clinical experiences. Outcome 2.2d: Simulation-based and authentic instructional experiences emphasizing implementation and leadership in supporting colleagues' use of EBLI will be integrated into at least two courses throughout the MEd program.

Goal 3: Increase district and regional capacity to sustain EBLI for English learners (in elementary and middle schools) along the continuum of needs through collaborative school-university partnerships. Objective 3.1: Provide targeted support through workshops, coaching, mentoring, and family engagement to at least 2 high-EL schools annually in each partner district (4 high-EL schools total). Outcome 3.1a: Each year, at least two high-EL schools in Anne Arundel County Public Schools and two high-EL schools in Baltimore County Public Schools (4 total) will participate in project-supported coaching, workshops, mentoring, or family engagement activities supporting EBLI based on school input and identified needs. Outcome 3.1b: School-based professional learning activities will be developed collaboratively and offered at least once per quarter, per school to address identified instructional priorities related to EBLI for English learners. Objective 3.2: Develop and disseminate multimedia and virtual professional learning resources supporting EBLI for English learners. Outcome 3.2a: At least three virtual or multimedia real-time professional development opportunities for effective instruction of ELs will be developed and offered annually to educators throughout Maryland. Outcome 3.2b: At least three multimedia professional learning resources will be developed each year to emphasize EBLI, explicit academic vocabulary development, language acquisition for ELs with and without disabilities, and instructional practices that support English learners' access to grade-level content. Objective 3.3: Develop teacher leadership by preparing 30 inservice

participants to serve as school-based facilitators of EBLI. Outcome 3.3a: 30 graduate participants will each design and implement at least one professional learning activity, coaching cycle, mentoring experience, or family engagement event supporting EBLI within schools.

Outcome 3.3b: 30 graduate participants will document implementation of EBLI in their school settings through leadership artifacts, reflective practice, and performance-based evaluation.

Objective 3.4: Develop teacher capacity to implement EBLI through authentic clinical experience supporting EL students through TU's Language and Literacy Summer Clinic.

Outcome 3.4a: Over the life of the project, 123 preservice and graduate participants will collaboratively provide EBLI to English learners through the Language and Literacy Summer Clinic. Outcome 3.4b: 120 elementary-and middle-grade EL students from AACPS, BCPS and surrounding communities will participate in EBLI through TU's Language and Literacy Summer Clinic (30 per year). Outcome 3.4c: Student language and literacy growth during the Summer Clinic will be measured using curriculum-aligned pre/post assessments to document student learning and inform continuous improvement of project activities with an average score of 80% on curriculum-aligned post-assessments.

As indicated above, these goals, objectives and outcomes are **clearly specified and measurable**. They are ambitious yet achievable, as the project narrative details plans, timeframes and personnel responsible for achieving project goals; targets (specified in the Project Outcomes Chart) are realistic yet rigorous. They are tightly aligned to the purposes of the grant program as all goals and objectives focus on providing high-quality professional development “**intended to improve instruction for ELs and assist education personnel working with ELs to meet high professional standards.**” All goals and objectives are directly designed to

provide PD opportunities that will “**enhance classroom instruction for ELs and improve the qualifications and skills of educational personnel involved in educating ELs.**” ASCENT goals and objectives also promise to “**boost the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders in addressing the needs of ELs**” through the project’s focus on systemwide improvement, meaningful clinical experience, and implementation of EBLI practices for ELs for preservice and inservice educators (United States Department of Labor, 2026). The project’s goals are further aligned to **the Government Performance and Reporting Act (GPRA) measures** for the 2026 NPD Competition with targets below: **GPRA Measure 1:** The number of preservice program participants enrolled annually (Target: 15) (Goal 1). TU proposes to report on this measure using program enrollment data, course completion data, student transcripts, student course evaluations, student pre-post surveys, student coursework and PD artifacts. **GPRA Measure 2:** The percentage of participants who have attained initial State certification/ licensure or endorsement in EL instruction. Target: 95% of 123 participants, or 116). This project focuses on ESOL endorsement for educators with a primary license in another area. For educators with a primary licensure area, ESOL endorsement involves a) demonstration of reading proficiency via noncredit PD or examination and b) demonstration of ESOL proficiency through a passing score on the ESOL Praxis examination or completion of sufficient coursework (12-24 credits). ASCENT will provide participants with preparation to complete multiple options on these pathways to licensure, as the 18- and 36-credit hour programs include 12 credit hours in ESOL and participants will also receive ample preparation and support in completing the ESOL and TRE Praxis examinations. Licensure in Maryland is often processed via school system certification offices rather than universities or individual participants, with universities not always privy to

school system records regarding licensure. Therefore TU proposes to collect and report data on this measure representing participants who receive Maryland licensure or endorsement in EL instruction or who complete requirements for eligibility. TU will collect and report data using verification of certification or eligibility for certification through Maryland state licensure database records where available; participant self-report and documentation provided regarding licensure status; and review of transcripts, program completion and licensure examination scores to substantiate eligibility for licensure.

GPRA Measure 3: The percentage of participants receiving initial certification or endorsement who demonstrate an increase in student achievement as measured by district grade level learning objectives (Goals 1, 2): Target: 95%. TU proposes to report on this measure through the following data sources: participating school and teacher student-level data if approved by school system IRB; participant self-report without identifying information; summer program data from students taught by preservice and inservice participants demonstrating student achievement on researcher-created measures aligned with Maryland College and Career Ready Standards. **GPRA Measure 4:** The number of participants completing the NPD funded PD (Goals 1, 2). Target: 95%. TU proposes to report on this measure through data including participant transcripts, graduation rates and course completion data, course evaluations, pre-post survey data, and PD and coursework artifacts. **GPRA Measure 5:** Number of participants completing NPD funded PD who demonstrate use of EB instructional EL strategies, as measured by classroom observation, instructional artifacts, and student language and cultural efficacy (Goals 1, 2, 3). Target: 100%. TU proposes to report on this measure through performance-based

observation tools (OR-EBLI), review of artifacts using a rubric scoring for EB instructional strategies for ELs, and evaluation of student performance.

Each of these proposed GPRA targets is **ambitious**, as the applicant proposes to meet 95-100% of GPRA targets. These targets are also **achievable**, as the project narrative details specific timeframes and plans for attainment and the resources and management plan supporting the project. The applicant will use both **quantitative and qualitative data collection reporting methods**, which are referenced in the management plan and spelled out in the evaluation section, including surveys, observation, interview, analysis of graduation rates, and analysis of licensure eligibility and Praxis passage data. These methods are part of a **comprehensive evaluation plan**, which will be implemented by a team with **expertise in qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods analysis, and as such are likely to yield valid, reliable and meaningful performance data**. TU is a comprehensive university with a well-established Office of Research and Evaluation in the COE as well as a University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, along with strong project management as described in this proposal, ensuring the capacity to collect and report this data. TU has successfully collected, analyzed and reported data for current and prior federal grants, including NPD grants and other U.S. Department of Education funded projects.

(ii) The extent to which the proposed project will provide support, resources, or services; or otherwise address the needs of the target population, including addressing the needs of underserved populations most affected by the issue, challenge, or opportunity, to be addressed by the proposed project and close gaps in educational opportunity. The target population of ASCENT is **Maryland educators serving ELs, including preservice and inservice**

teachers in a Maryland IHE and inservice educators in two high-EL Maryland school systems.

This **target population** is essential in meeting the needs of **ELs in Maryland, an underserved population** dramatically impacted by the need for qualified, knowledgeable ELD teachers.

ASCENT provides evidence-aligned **support, resources and services** that directly affect ELs' achievement in order to close gaps in educational opportunity.

ELs across the country, and in Maryland, are underserved and face gaps in educational opportunity and achievement. There are approximately 5.3 million ELs in the United States (NCES, 2024a) and 114,526 in Maryland (MSDE, 2025a). ELs constitute 10% of American students nationally and 13% of Maryland students, an increase over ten (7.7%) or even five years ago (10%). However, despite their growing numbers, ELs remain at risk for lower graduation, academic under-achievement, decreased access to challenging coursework, and decreased college attendance. The national graduation rate for ELs is 72%, in comparison to 87% for all students (NCELA, 2026), and only 7% of ELs are enrolled in Advanced Placement or other college-level coursework, a rate approximately half of non-EL students (United States Department of Education, 2021). Fewer than 20% of ELs attend college (Johnson, 2019) and ELs are at increased risk of being misidentified for special education services (IES, 2021).

These national disparities are replicated in Maryland as well. There are 121,985 ELs in Maryland, constituting 13.6% of Maryland students in 2025. Statewide in 2025, only 19.1% of ELs in third grade read at grade level, and by seventh grade only 7.5% of ELs read at grade level (MSDE, 2025b). Statewide graduation rates for ELs are 60.84%, in contrast to the overall graduation rate for all students of 86.44%. One contributing factor to ELs' challenges is persistent teacher shortages; in 2025 425,412 teaching positions across the country were

unfilled or filled by teachers not fully certified for their teaching assignments (Learning Policy Institute, 2025). Maryland reported 886 teacher vacancies in 2025-2026, with ESOL/ English Language Development being a consistent high-need area (MSDE, 2026). Vacancies are increasingly likely to be filled by conditionally licensed teachers who may enter the classroom with no formal preparation in language acquisition or EB instruction and who have not had the opportunity for mentored, supervised teaching practice before entering the classroom (NCES, 2024b). In response, institutions including TU's COE have begun to offer innovative programming to nontraditional teacher candidates. For example, in 2025-2026, 37% of undergraduate candidates in the Department of Special Education programs were completing nontraditional Bachelor's programs while working in school systems, and the COE currently has 8 distinct partnerships for nontraditional Bachelor's programs, including with AACPS and BCPS. These candidates often bring a strong understanding of student needs as well as a deep connection to their communities; however, their primary-licensure programs are often tightly sequenced and do not provide opportunity for additional coursework in areas such as ESOL. **ASCENT directly addresses these workforce development needs for the target population in order to close gaps in opportunity via EBLI-focused PD differentiated based on candidates' preparation and experience level.**

The national and statewide issues impacting EL achievement are reflected in AACPS and BCPS, the partner districts for this application. AACPS and BCPS are large Maryland districts which together account for 21.9% of Maryland's overall students and 19.2% of Maryland's EL students. BCPS (enrollment 107,983) surrounds the entire Baltimore metropolitan area and AACPS (enrollment 84,256) extends from southern Baltimore to Annapolis. Both districts

encompass urban, suburban and rural areas and include numerous high-poverty schools (MSDE, 2025b). In 2025, English learners (ELs) constituted 10.8% of AACPS students or 9,183 out of 85,029 students, with higher representation at the elementary level (12.4%) forecasting continued growth.

ELs are less likely to read proficiently than AACPS students as a whole; only 21.2% of 3rd-grade ELs, in contrast to 57% of all 3rd graders, read proficiently. About half (55.6%) of AACPS 6th graders and 68.2% of all 10th graders were proficient readers in 2025, but only 6% of ELs could read proficiently in 6th grade and only 12.8% of ELs in 10th grade could read on grade level (MSDE, 2025b). While the AACPS graduation rate for all students was 88.92%, the graduation rate for ELs was only 58.19%. The dropout rate for AACPS' overall student population was 7.39% in 2020, compared to a 32.49% dropout rate for the county's ELs. This sharp disparity continues through post-secondary education: 68.6% of AACPS students who graduated in 2024 enrolled in college within 16 months, compared to 21.7% of ELs who graduated (MSDE, 2025b). Within BCPS, English learners (ELs) constituted 12.5% of BCPS students or 13,794 out of 107,850 students, with higher representation at the elementary level 12.5% forecasting continued growth. ELs are less likely to read proficiently than BCPS students as a whole; only 18.7% of 3rd-grade ELs, in contrast to 47.3% of all 3rd graders, read proficiently. About half (40.4%) of BCPS 6th graders and 50.6% of all 10th graders were proficient readers in 2025, but only 5% of ELs could read proficiently in 6th grade and only 9.6% of ELs in 10th grade could read on grade level (MSDE, 2025b). While the BCPS graduation rate for all students was 84.3%, the graduation rate for ELs was only 55.8%. The dropout rate for BCPS' overall student population was 12.18% in 2025, compared to a 38.28% dropout rate for

the county's ELs. As in AACPS, ELs continue on to higher education at a much lower rate: 65.7% of BCPS students who graduated in 2024 enrolled in college within 16 months, compared to 35.9% of ELs who graduated (MSDE, 2025b).

ASCENT will address the needs of ELs in both these counties through targeted PD provided directly to high-EL schools in order to create schoolwide change and a model for improvement across districts. The chart below identifies key demographics for the potential target schools with high EL populations in AACPS and BCPS, substantiating their need for EB literacy support for ELs. As indicated, final school selection will be made based on needs assessment post-funding.

	District	% ELs	% meeting expectations in ESOL?	% 3 rd graders proficient in reading	% 3 rd grade ELs proficient in reading
Tyler Heights	AACPS	62.8%	10.8%	27%	13.6%
Eastport	AACPS	43.2%	7.7%	46.8%	31.6%
Colgate	BCPS	54.9%	5%	15.6%	6.5%
Padonia Elementary	BCPS	47%	13.8%	29%	15.4%

In providing targeted PD to the selected schools, TU will be able to draw on longstanding collaborative relationships with each of these districts. AACPS, BCPS and TU have strong existing relationships through multiple professional development partnerships for preservice and inservice teacher development. In particular, AACPS and TU partner on an existing National

Professional Development grant focused on family engagement, student well-being, and language and literacy support in high-EL elementary schools. This partnership, the ELEVATE project, has resulted in measurable gains: 33 preservice teachers thus far have completed requirements for ESOL endorsement; 25 inservice teachers are completing or recently completed training in literacy and ESOL for a reading specialist degree and ESOL endorsement; an additional five cohorts of candidates are completing advanced MEd training in ESOL and special education with ESOL endorsement or on track for it; and site-based PD has occurred at five schools with high EL populations. ELs and families in the target schools have participated in workshops and literacy programs and received materials for use at home; ESOL and content teachers have received PD in the form of conferences, workshops, coaching, planning assistance, book studies and consultative support from project staff. In addition, ELEVATE faculty have developed a performance-based observation instrument, the TESOL-Standards-Aligned Performance Based Assessment, to measure teachers' implementation of standards-based instructional practices for ELs which has been deployed for two cohorts of teachers thus far (Gerry et al., 2026).

ASCENT builds on existing accomplishments, addresses needs of the target population, and **closes opportunity gaps for ELs** with an interrelated, systemic approach to PD focused on ELs and EBLI across multiple Maryland districts. Model components are described below:

I: Effective instruction for ELs: ASCENT focuses on EBLI for ELs using practices with moderate evidence of support (Vaughn et al, 2009), focused on explicit teaching of vocabulary; use of multimedia resources and purposeful discussion; use of writing and graphic organizers for comprehension; and structured peer pairing. Vaughn et al. found that this approach produced

gains in both language and content learning for ELs, but that teachers needed instruction and support in using these evidence-based approaches (2009), underscoring the benefit of high-quality PD aligned to evidence. This model will be integrated into TU's educator preparation and PD through coursework specifically focused on literacy for ELs and EB literacy practices at the preservice, early career, and advanced practice level. Clinical experiences in each program will provide candidates with timely and actionable feedback about their instructional practices, including EBLI practices. Clinical experiences will also incorporate observation and feedback using two instruments, the TESOL Standards-Aligned Performance-Based Rubric (TA-PBA) which has been developed and piloted at TU as part of a prior NPD grant, and a TU-designed observational rubric for implementing EBLI (OR-EBLI) to ensure effective and research-based instruction for ELs is supported and scaffolded across school-based settings, including AACPS target schools, BCPS target schools and any additional schools where MEd students work. These instruments will be utilized with collaborative input and support from stakeholders including school system partners, mentors and faculty who will be invited to provide input on instrument development where applicable and review results in order to make recommendations for program improvement.

Effective instruction for ELs is also supported, directly and indirectly, through the ASCENT Language and Literacy Summer Clinic. Each summer, ASCENT will offer a Language and Literacy Summer Clinic that will serve as both an intensive instructional program for elementary and middle-grade ELs, with priority to those from AACPS and BCPS site schools, and an authentic clinical experience for preservice and graduate participants. The Summer Clinic will last four weeks (4 half-day sessions per week) and be staffed by preservice and early career

participants, mentored by experienced MEd candidates, under the direction of TU faculty.

Teachers will provide EBLI for at least 30 elementary English learners annually to support content and vocabulary instruction which includes rich opportunities for purposeful discussion, meaningful writing, explicit language and vocabulary instruction, and peer pairing. (Vaughn et al, 2009) Candidates will receive ongoing mentoring, support and performance-based feedback from TU faculty including measurement of practice using the TA-PBA and the OR-EBLI. In addition to providing ELs with effective language and literacy instruction through this summer program, this clinic will provide teachers with direct, actionable feedback on teaching strengths and areas for improvement, which will carry over into supporting general instructional practice across settings.

II: Intensive PD and induction for preservice and early-career teachers centered on EBLI and language instruction for ELs. This intensive PD, accessible to preservice traditionally prepared teachers, early career teachers and including those completing nontraditional preparation programs, directly addresses the systemic issues underlying achievement and opportunity gaps through its focus on EBLI, academic language and content achievement; up-to-date knowledge regarding the learning process; guided and mentored clinical experiences for improvements in practice; and ongoing assessment of teaching practices. Taken together, these components provide a strong foundation which addresses educators' need to understand effective instruction for ELs and which equips them to close opportunity gaps so that their EL students can make gains in both language and content. Candidate status will be monitored prior to and during coursework to ensure continued eligibility. The preservice PD program for **traditional students** includes six courses (18 credits) leading to a minor in Linguistic Diversity and eligibility

for ESOL endorsement in Maryland. The **early-career inservice PD program for nontraditional program graduates employed in AACPS, BCPS or other local school systems** includes four courses (12 credits) taken immediately upon Baccalaureate degree completion and initial licensure and leading to a post-baccalaureate certificate (PBC) in Teaching English Language Learners (T-ELL). The program offered to nontraditional students is shorter in recognition of their existing knowledge and experience base and their prior experience with ELs in MD school systems. All candidates will complete embedded program experiences including emphasis on evidence-based literacy. Program elements also include simulation and authentic clinical teaching with ELs to support integration of language and content objectives and ongoing collaborative measurement of teaching practices to support effective instruction of ELs with input from university faculty, supervisors, candidates, school system partners and stakeholders, via TU's two performance-based instruments, the TA-PBA and the to-be-developed OR-EBLI. Elements of EBLI included in program coursework are indicated in the chart in the appendices (Appendix G) in specific program classes.

The preservice program timeline is described below. Participants will begin the ASCENT program in Year 3 at TU, or their pre-professional year, complete required TU courses for their primary degree in fall and spring, and complete ASCENT electives and preparation experiences in minimester and summer before and after their professional year. All candidates will be offered induction support in the year following the two-year preparation program, with Year 1 dedicated to planning and recruitment. Undergraduate preservice coursework for the Linguistic Diversity (LDIV) minor is listed below and represented in the sequence chart following. All listed courses are 3 credits. Courses include: Foreign language or other

substitution (A foreign language or other appropriate substitution is required for the LDIV minor and provides candidates a strong foundation in language elements, basics of intercultural communication and firsthand experience with language learning.); ELED 426, Literacy Instruction for Linguistically Diverse Learners; ECED 457, Methods and Materials for Multilingual Settings; ECED 458, Field-Based Practicum Experiences in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Settings; ELED 451, Assessment of Multilingual Learners; ELED 452, Linguistics and Grammar for Multilingual and Monolingual Learners. UG1: Undergraduate preservice cohort 1. UG 2: Undergraduate preservice cohort 2. UG 3: Undergraduate preservice cohort 3.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Fall	Recruit UG1	UG 1: regular full-time TU preparation program Recruit UG2	UG1, UG2: regular full- time TU preparation program Recruit UG3	UG2, UG3: regular full-time TU preparation program Recruit UG3 UG1: 2 induction workshops	UG3: regular full-time TU preparation program UG 2 (2 induction workshops)
Minimester (Jan term)	Recruit UG1	UG 1: ELED 452	UG 1: ELED 451	UG 2: ELED 451 UG3: ELED 452	UG3: ELED 451

			UG2: ELED 452	UG1: 1 induction workshop	UG 2 (1 induction workshop)
Spring	Recruit UG1	UG1: regular full-time TU preparation program Recruit UG2	UG1, UG2: regular full- time TU preparation program Recruit UG3	UG2, UG3: regular full-time TU preparation program UG1: 1 induction workshop	UG3: regular full- time TU preparation program UG 2 (1 induction workshop)
Summer	UG1: ECED 457, ELED 426 Recruit UG2	UG1: Foreign language or related course; ECED 458 UG2: ECED 457, ELED 426 Recruit UG3	UG2: Foreign language or related course; ECED 458 UG3: ECED 457, ELED 426	UG3: Foreign language or related course; ECED 458	

Table 1: Undergraduate PD Courses and Program Sequence

Early-career (EC) inservice PD is described below. Candidates prioritized for this PD (EC Cohort 1, 2, 3 and 4) will be early-career (first-year) graduates of nontraditional programs, and ASCENT will provide valuable support in their first year of teaching. Coursework for the Teaching English Learners (T-ELL) Post Baccalaureate Certificate is listed below and represented in the sequence chart following; all courses are 3 credits. Courses include: REED 650, Social, Cultural, and Curricular Contexts for Second Language Learning; REED 651, Instruction and Assessment for Second Language Learners; REED 652, Introduction to Linguistics for Teachers of Language and Literacy; REED 665, Literacy in the Content Areas PreK–12.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Fall	Recruit EC 1	EC 1: REED 650	EC 2: REED 650	EC 3: REED 650	EC 4: REED 650
Minimester (Jan term)	Noncredit PD (explicit instruction)	Noncredit PD (multi-media resources and purposeful discussion)	Noncredit PD (writing and graphic organizers)	Noncredit PD: (peer learning opportunities)	Noncredit PD: (Academic language refresher: explicit content and language instruction)

Spring	Recruitment EC1	Recruitment EC2. EC 1: REED 651	Recruitment EC3 EC 2: REED 651	Recruitment EC4; EC3: REED 651	EC4: REED 651
Summer		EC 1: REED 652, REED 665	EC 2: REED 652, REED 665	EC 3: REED 652, REED 665	EC 4: REED 652, REED 665

Table 2: Coursework and sequence for early-career educators

PD for preservice and early-career inservice educators includes the following common elements aligned to research:

Coursework Focus on Second Language Acquisition and EBLI: Coursework prepares candidates to implement explicit, systematic literacy instruction, with emphasis on the benefits of a multi-component model addressed in Vaughn et al. (2009), which will be integrated into coursework, program assessments, clinical experiences and simulation teaching using Mursion to ensure candidates have a thorough conceptual understanding as well as the practical skills needed to implement EB practices. **This component closes opportunity gaps for English learners by ensuring educators have the knowledge and instructional skills to provide rigorous, EBLI that supports both language development and academic achievement.**

Additional Noncredit Professional Development Opportunities: In addition to credit-bearing coursework, participants engage in noncredit January-term or induction experiences, as appropriate for their status, to extend and continue learning. Each noncredit PD opportunity

will focus on a specific EB instructional practice for ELs' literacy instruction and provide candidates with opportunities to understand the research foundations, learn and practice strategies for implementing that aspect. **This component closes opportunity gaps for ELs** by ensuring educators remain current in evidence-based instructional practices and are prepared to respond to evolving student, school, and district needs.

Clinical Experiences with ELs: Throughout the program, participants engage in supervised clinical experiences with English learners in authentic school settings and structured simulation environments. Clinical experiences emphasize implementation of EBLI, including explicit vocabulary instruction, purposeful discussion, use of writing and graphic organizers, and structured peer pairing. Clinical experiences will be completed using Mursion simulation technology and authentic clinical practice in the TU Summer Language and Literacy Clinic, where preservice and early-career educators will collaborate with TU faculty and experienced educators participating in MEd-level programming. This component **closes opportunity gaps for English learners** by ensuring educators can effectively translate evidence-based instructional knowledge into high-quality classroom practice that improves student learning.

III: Intensive PD and advanced MEd preparation to inservice teachers to build knowledge, capacity, and leadership development for implementing EBLI for ELs along the continuum of needs. Systemic change relies upon knowledge and skills of early-career educators, but it is equally important to foster continued growth and develop leadership in experienced educators. Schools and ELs alike need experienced educators who understand the full continuum of ELs' needs and can provide effective instruction, assessment and interventions to those who may need additional support. Research has found that ELs with reading disabilities, in particular,

benefit from multi-component reading instruction and emphasis on elements such as vocabulary and oral language (Hall, Steinle & Vaughn, 2019). Accordingly, ASCENT will also fund a cadre of 30 **experienced educators (2 cohorts of 15)** who will complete an MEd in Special Education with ESOL-Multilingual Learner Emphasis. To support systemic change in partner districts, educators from AACPS and BCPS will be prioritized. This advanced preparation ensures educators are prepared to implement EBLI for all ELs, including those with literacy needs or disabilities, and have the skills and experience to become instructional leaders in their school communities to support colleagues in implementing effective instruction for ELs as well.

Courses and timelines for Advanced PD are listed below. All courses are 3 credits for a total of 36 program credits. SPED 525: Formal Tests and Measurements for Students with Disabilities (PreK–12); SPED 601: Transition Across the Lifespan; SPED 633: School, Family and Community Collaboration for Diverse Populations; SPED 607: Curriculum/Methods of Classroom Management for Students with Disabilities; SPED 631: Classroom Strategies and Interventions for Diverse Student Populations; SPED 632: Assessment Issues for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students; SPED 641: Education of Students with Disabilities (SWD): Methods of Instruction; SPED 646: Using Technology to Differentiate Instruction; SPED 670: Special Topics: Evidence-Based Literacy for ELs; SPED 671: Special Topics: Leadership in Content and Literacy Instruction for ELs; REED 652: Linguistics for Teachers of Language and Literacy; SPED 650: Social and Curricular Contexts for Second Language Learning.

Coursework begins in Year 2 to allow for a recruitment and planning year in Year 1.

	Year 2 (Cohort 1)	Year 3 (C1)	Year 4 (Cohort 2)	Year 5 (C2)
Fall	SPED 633 SPED 646	SPED 650 SPED 601	SPED 633 SPED 646	SPED 650 SPED 601
Minimester	Noncredit PD	Noncredit PD	Noncredit PD	Noncredit PD
Spring	SPED 525 SPED 632	SPED 607 SPED 631	SPED 525 SPED 632	SPED 607 SPED 631
Summer	SPED 641 SPED 670	SPED 671 REED 652	SPED 641 SPED 670	SPED 671 REED 652

Table 3: MEd program sequence.

Courses are aligned with essential program strands: EBLI (Vaughn et al, 2009); support for ELs along the continuum of needs (Burr, Haas & Ferriere, 2015), including those with reading difficulties (Hall, Steinle & Vaughn, 2019); leadership development; and advanced clinical practice. The chart located in the appendix demonstrates alignment of these strands with courses and program components. Assessment and dissemination of candidate learning is described in the final column as this is an important element of advanced educator preparation. Based on current MD endorsement requirements, the program contains 12 credits of ESOL content (SPED 631, SPED 632, REED 650, REED 652) and 12 credits of related content (SPED 633, SPED 670, SPED 671, SPED 646) aligned to Maryland ESOL endorsement requirements. Candidates may also satisfy licensure requirements via the ESOL and TRE Praxis examinations as described previously.

In addition to coursework focused on EBLI and the continuum of ELs' needs, participants also strengthen their capacity to serve as instructional leaders by facilitating professional learning in their schools, focused on EBLI and supporting ELs across the continuum of needs, via a School-Based PD project, mentoring preservice and early-career teachers in the Summer Clinic, and developing a Leadership Portfolio demonstrating their ability to lead EBLI in their school communities focusing on evidence-based practices such as explicit language and vocabulary instruction, writing, and purposeful discussion (Vaughn et al 2009; Hall, Steinle & Vaughn, 2019). This component **closes opportunity gaps for English learners** by building teacher and school capacity to provide EBLI, differentiate and program for ELs along the continuum of needs, and support colleagues and teams in doing the same. It further aligns with research (Watson & Donahue, 2025) finding that collaborative team-based PD for educators can improve outcomes for ELs with and without disabilities.

IV. ASCENT School Based PD: As a final core program element, to foster systemic change, ASCENT will provide targeted support to at least 2 schools per partner district (4 total) with high EL enrollment, with PD based on principles of EBLI for ELs. The school-based PD component of this project will be conducted in partnership with AACPS and BCPS (see attached letters of support) to create model sites for best practices implementation and dissemination. PD will focus on language acquisition for ELs, evidence-based literacy strategies for ELs, and capacity-building for teachers and staff. Through collaboration and partnership, TU, AACPS and BCPS will finalize the selection of participating schools based on enrollment and district-identified needs and priorities. The School-Based PD Coordinator will conduct informal and formal needs assessment and develop professional learning activities tailored to the needs of each school.

Professional learning activities will be offered at least once per quarter and will consist of workshops, instructional coaching or mentoring, collaborative lesson planning, book studies, and other appropriate follow-up support aligned to principles of EBLI as determined by school-based needs assessments. This support will provide school staff with support for explicit academic vocabulary development, language-content integration, comprehension instruction, and effective support for English learners across the continuum of need. In addition to school site-based activities, project faculty and the PD Coordinator will develop virtual learning opportunities such as webinars, workshops and conferences and multimedia PD resources such as website pages, blog posts, videos, Mursion simulation scenarios, digital books and resources for educators within and across school sites. As graduate participants develop instructional leadership skills, they will work with support from the Professional Development Coordinator to facilitate professional learning activities in their own schools, creating additional synergy with existing PD efforts in AACPS and BCPS.

(iii) The likely benefit to the intended recipients, as indicated by the logic model or other conceptual framework, of the services to be provided. ASCENT's logic model demonstrates a clear pathway through which the PD services will provide clear benefit to participants, partner schools and districts, and ultimately ELs. The model begins with strong institutional and district partnerships, experienced faculty, and existing educator preparation infrastructure that support implementation of evidence-based professional development. These inputs are translated into a coordinated continuum of services—including preservice preparation, induction, advanced graduate preparation, clinical practice, leadership development, and school-based professional learning—that progressively build educator expertise while strengthening district capacity to

sustain EBLI for ELs. The intended recipients include preservice teacher candidates, practicing educators, instructional leaders, partner schools in AACPS and BCPS, and ultimately the ELs they serve. In the short term, participants will increase their knowledge of second language acquisition and instruction, EBLI, clinical practice, and (for MEd participants) leadership and support for ELs across the continuum of needs. Participants will demonstrate improved implementation of evidence-based instructional practices through classroom observations, performance-based assessments, instructional artifacts, and leadership activities. The logic model further anticipates medium-term benefits through increased teacher effectiveness, stronger instructional leadership, and expanded school capacity to implement EBLI across classrooms and grade levels. Graduate participants will extend the impact of the project by mentoring colleagues, facilitating professional learning, and supporting implementation of evidence-based instructional practices within their schools, thereby multiplying the benefits of the project beyond individual participants. The collaborative partnerships among TU, AACPS, and BCPS further strengthen sustainability by embedding professional learning within district priorities and existing educator support systems. The long-term benefit of ASCENT is a sustainable increase in educator and district capacity to support ELs across the continuum of need through consistent implementation of EBLI. ELs will benefit from improved access to rigorous academic content, stronger language and literacy development, explicit vocabulary and comprehension instruction, and consistent implementation of EBLI by skilled teachers in supportive and effective schools. Because the project intentionally links educator preparation, leadership development, clinical practice, and continuous improvement within a unified theory of action, the benefits of the proposed services are anticipated to extend beyond the grant

period by effecting lasting changes in educator knowledge and pedagogical skills, teaching practices, and school, system and regional capacity.

(iv) The extent to which the training or professional development services to be provided by the proposed project are of sufficient quality, intensity, and duration to build recipient and project capacity in ways that lead to improvements in practice among the recipients of those services. The professional development provided by ASCENT is of sufficient quality, intensity and duration to build capacity among preservice teachers, inservice teachers, and school-based staff and will therefore lead to improvements in practice as indicated below for each group of recipients of project services.

	Quality	Intensity	Duration	Capacity Building	Practice Improvements
Preservice teachers	Aligned to EBLI; rigorous coursework; integration of clinical experience; aligned to research and practice	18 credit program coupled with noncredit PD and clinical experience	Three-year program including coursework followed by induction	Preservice teachers once trained will improve capacity in local schools and systems by alleviating staffing shortages and	Direct connection to improvements in practice via clinical experience, supported implementation of EB literacy, support of EL

				implementing effective practice to close opportunity gaps for ELs	students in TU's summer clinic, ongoing focus on EB practices for literacy instruction of ELs
Early career inservice	Aligned to EBLI; rigorous coursework; integration of clinical experience; aligned to research and practice	12 credit program, noncredit PD, clinical experience	Programmin g begins immediately upon graduation and includes intensive support through first year of teaching	Early career educators will improve capacity in local schools and systems by alleviating staffing shortages and implementing effective practice to close	Direct connection to improvements in practice via clinical experience, support of EL students in TU's summer clinic, supported implementatio n of EB literacy, ongoing focus

				opportunity gaps for ELs	on EB practices for literacy instruction of ELs
Inservice teacher- leaders	Aligned to EBLI; rigorous coursework; integration of advanced clinical experience; leadership development ; aligned to research and practice	36 credit program over two years including advanced clinical experience and leadership developmen t	Two year program followed by continued support from program for AACPS/BCPS educators	Inservice educators will build capacity in their schools through leadership, collegial support, and implementatio n and modeling of best practices for ELs along continuum of need	Direct connection to practice improvements via support of colleagues in implementing EB practices
School- based staff and	Targeted support to at least two	Focused support to each school	Ongoing relationship over the	Capacity building activities will	Direct improvements in practice via

school systems	high EL schools per district; PD support for EBLI; mentoring, coaching and workshops/ book study	from dedicated PD coordinator; access to multimedia and digital resources; ongoing relationship	duration of the grant; sustained support from TU and PD coordinator	build staff knowledge and skills and empower teachers to support each other	TU coaching, PD, sharing resources and modeling best practices
ELs Impacted by ASCENT	Indirect support through preservice and inservice PD; direct and indirect benefits from school-based capacity-building; direct	Ongoing relationships with highly qualified teachers familiar with EB literacy practices; ongoing attendance at schools participating	Summer clinic: ongoing 4-week literacy clinic (4 days/week) for 30 students. School attendance and participation	Direct and indirect interventions benefiting ELs will enable students to access challenging curriculum, succeed in schools, and meet language	ELs benefit from educators' practice improvements, capacity-building within and across teacher workforce, and school/system improvement.

	benefits from clinic participation	in systemic PD. Summer clinic: ongoing 4- week literacy clinic (4 days/week) for 30 students.	in instruction: ongoing	acquisition and content goals.	
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(v) The likelihood that the services to be provided by the proposed project will lead to meaningful improvements in the achievement of students as measured against rigorous and relevant standards. Services to be provided by ASCENT will lead to meaningful improvements in student achievement (Figure 1, appendix G) through multiple mechanisms aligned to rigorous, relevant standards. The following program elements in particular provide robust support for EL achievement as measured against rigorous and relevant standards.

Emphasis on EBLI for ELs: ASCENT is designed to improve student achievement by strengthening educators' implementation of EBLI (Vaughn et al., 2009). This emphasis is further strengthened by systematic measurement of candidates' implementation of EBLI through the OR-EBLI instrument during Mursion simulation and clinical practice activities. Observation data will document educators' implementation of key instructional practices while providing evidence that professional development is translated into high-quality classroom instruction.

Evaluation of pedagogical strategies connected to student achievement: Specific teaching practices have a well-documented connection to student achievement, and ASCENT leverages these practices. Use of effective pedagogical techniques is positively associated with meaningful improvements in student achievement (Blitz, 2025; [Damyanov, 2024](#)). Preservice and inservice educator performance will be evaluated using performance-based assessments. Consistent with the Invitational Priority, ASCENT systematically observes and measures instructional practices associated with successful outcomes for ELs, based on collaboration with school system personnel and student mentors who will provide input. Observation data, instructional artifacts, participant reflection, and feedback from real-time interaction in simulation practice, summer clinic, and authentic school environments will provide ongoing evidence of changes in teacher practice while documenting relationships between EB pedagogy and student learning.

Clinical Experiences and Assessment of Student Performance: Participants apply evidence-based instructional practices throughout supervised clinical experiences, including simulation experiences using Mursion and the annual Language and Literacy Summer Clinic serving ELs. EL performance will be assessed in clinic using curriculum-based assessments aligned with Maryland's State College and Career Ready Standards, to which all Maryland district curricula also align. When available, district assessment data, school performance data, and English learner language proficiency measures will be incorporated into the evaluation to examine changes in student performance relative to rigorous district and state standards. Multiple sources of evidence will provide a comprehensive picture of student learning while allowing project personnel to monitor progress toward intended outcomes throughout the grant period.

Formative assessment of PD based on student achievement data from clinic and school data:

ASCENT incorporates continuous improvement by using educator performance data, observation results, instructional artifacts, participant feedback, and student achievement data to refine project implementation throughout the grant period. Project faculty, district partners, and the evaluation team will review these data regularly to strengthen coursework, clinical experiences, coaching, induction activities, workshops, and school-based professional learning. As reflected in the logic model, by systematically connecting educator preparation, instructional practice, and student outcomes, ASCENT provides a strong rationale that the proposed services will lead to meaningful improvements in student achievement.

(b) Quality of the management plan: The feasibility of the management plan to achieve project objectives and goals on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks. The management plan is based on the project’s Logic Model, found in the appendix, and is adequate to achieve all goals and objectives on time and within budget. The project’s budget is reasonable and allocates a substantial percentage of resources (60%) to **direct student tuition support** in order to directly prepare educators to support ELs. Regular communication among all constituents, including the evaluation team, will ensure that project objectives are met on time and within budget. Activities, objectives, persons responsible and timelines are represented in the Activities Chart below. Items marked with a * repeat each year and are represented only once for space purposes. Project personnel are listed in the charts below; bios and job responsibilities are listed in the Position Descriptions appendix.

Table 6: Project Activities Chart: activities, persons responsible, outcomes.

D= Dr. Rice Doran. G = Dr. Gerry. M = Dr. Martinez-Alba. K = Dr. Knollman. E =Evaluation

Consultant. R= RAs. P = Project manager. S = School-based PD coordinator. H = Dr. Huggins,

Elementary Education program faculty. TU= other TU faculty. AA/BC= AACPS and BCPS School

system collaborators. UG: Undergraduate fellowship cohort 1, 2 or 3. PBC: PBC fellowship

cohort 1, 2, 3, or 4. MED.: M.Ed. cohort 1 or 2.

Year 1: September 2026-August 2027 (Months represented by initials: S=September,

O=October, etc.)

Key Activities	Objective	Person/s	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A
Hire project staff	All	PIs	X	X										
Submit for IRB approval	All	PI, E, AACPS, BCPS	X	X										
*Recruit M.Ed. 1 and PBC cohorts	1.2; 2.1; 3.3	M, G	X	X	X									
*Recruit UG cohort	1.1	M, G				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
*Convene advisory board including BCPS and AACPS reps	3.1; 3.2; 3.4	PIs, S, P, E, AACPS, BCPS	X						X					

Admit and advise MED/ PBC/ UG students*	1.1; 1.2; 2.1; 3.3	PIs, H				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Monitor progress and make formative adjustments*	All	All	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop SPED 670/671 courses	1.3; 2.2	PIs, TU							X	X	X	X	X	
Review and integrate multicomponent EBLI model across courses	1.3; 2.2	PIs, TU			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Plan for and develop summer clinic	3.1; 3.4	PIs, H, GA					X	X	X	X				
Recruit and enroll summer clinic students*	3.1; 3.4	PIs, H					X	X	X	X	X			
Initial meetings with schools, AACPS/BCPS Research Offices	3.1; 3.3	PIs, K, P, E	X	X	X									
Develop and deploy research instruments	All	PIs, E	X	X	X					X	X	X	X	X

Hold monthly evaluation meetings*	All	PIs, E	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hold monthly project management meetings	All	PIs, P	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Plan and begin school-based PD*	3.1; 3.3	P, S, PIs			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coordinate inservice PD activities, observations and workshops*	3.2; 3.3; 3.4	P, S, PIs			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Refine and pilot OR-EBLI observation instrument for use in preservice and inservice settings	3.2	PIs, E, P							X	X	X	X	X	
Maintain website*	All	P, S, GAs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Supervise M.Ed. students in planning school-based leadership and PD*	1.3, 2.1; 2.2	PIs,D, MED							X	X	X			

Attend annual PD's meeting*	All	PIs, E			X									
Submit quarterly and annual reports*	All	PIs, E	X			X		X			X			

Year 2: September 2027-August 2028

Activity	Objective	Person/s	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A
Recruit M.Ed. cohort 2*	1.2; 2.1; 3.3	P, D, M											X	X
Begin and continue PBC / MEd classes	1.2; 2.1; 3.3	P, M, D		X										
Offer school PD *	3.3	P, M, D, MEd	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Continue CE refinement	2.2	P, M, D	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	XX	
Recruit PBC2	2.1	P, PIs		X	X	X								
Continue to offer UG, PBC and MEd courses*	2.1, 3.1										X	X		

Year 3: September 2028-August 2029

Activity	Outcome	Person/s	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A
Recruit UG 3	1.1	P, D, N							X	X	X	X		

Develop and offer induction offerings*	1.1, 1.2	P, D, L	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Follow up with program completers to monitor graduation, licensure status and post-program feedback*	1.1	E		X	X								X	X

Year 4: September 2029-August 2030

Activity	Outcome	Person/s	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A
Continue all classes*	2.1	PIs, P	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Year 5: September 2030-August 2031

Activity	Outcome	Person/s	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A
Draft final summative project evaluation	All	E							X	X	X	X	X	X

Key project milestones associated with activities and outcomes are listed below.

Year 1 (2026–2027): Fall: Hire ASCENT Professional Development Coordinator and graduate assistants; convene Project Advisory Board; finalize partnership agreements with AACPS and BCPS; begin recruitment for MEd, PBC and UG cohorts; identify four partner elementary schools; conduct school needs assessments; develop school professional learning plans; submit

IRB applications; finalize evaluation instruments and plan to deploy as needed. January: Pre-assess Cohort 1; begin implementation of school-based PD; offer noncredit PD workshop; begin development of multimedia professional learning resources. Spring: Convene advisory Board; develop performance assessment instruments and procedures (administer TA-PBA); recruit Graduate Cohorts; implement quarterly school-based professional learning, coaching, and other school-based activities; continue development of ASCENT OR-EBLI; collect formative implementation data. Summer: Finalize recruitment and admissions for incoming students; offer 6 credits to UG1; review Year 1 implementation data; refine project activities for Year 2.

Year 2 (2027–2028): Fall: Matriculate Graduate Cohorts and begin graduate coursework; pre-assess graduate cohorts' knowledge and skills; continue implementation of school-based PD; expand coaching, mentoring, and school-based professional learning; support MEd student theory to practice and leadership activities; develop additional multimedia professional learning resources. Pilot ASCENT OR-EBLI. Convene Advisory Board. January: Offer noncredit PD; offer undergraduate coursework. Spring: Continue graduate coursework; convene Advisory Board; review Year 1 implementation data; implement quarterly professional learning and coaching in partner schools; support MEd student theory to practice and leadership activities; continue fidelity observations and formative evaluation; develop additional virtual professional learning resources; collect and analyze performance assessment data; recruit for Language and Literacy Summer Clinic. Summer: Offer undergraduate and graduate coursework; conduct Language and Literacy Summer Clinic; offer undergraduate coursework; analyze educator and student outcome data from academic year and from clinic; disseminate Year 2 professional learning resources; refine implementation for Year 3.

Year 3 (2028–2029): Fall: Continue Graduate Cohort 2 coursework; recruit Undergraduate Cohort 3; expand graduate participant leadership responsibilities; implement the ASCENT Evidence-Based Literacy Observation Protocol across program and school-based sites; convene Advisory Board; review Year 2 implementation data. January: Provide noncredit PD workshop; offer undergraduate coursework; facilitate winter professional learning workshops; graduate participants provide coaching and mentoring within partner schools; review project implementation. Spring: Continue coursework; implement quarterly coaching, mentoring, and professional learning; conduct fidelity observations; prepare conference presentations and dissemination materials. Convene Advisory Board; provide noncredit PD workshop; review Year 2 implementation data; collect and analyze performance assessment data. Summer: Conduct Language and Literacy Summer Clinic; offer undergraduate and graduate coursework; Undergraduate Cohort 1 completes ESOL endorsement requirements via coursework and Praxis; analyze Year 3 educator and student outcomes; disseminate project findings through presentations and publications.

Year 4 (2029–2030): Fall: Continue graduate and undergraduate coursework; continue implementation of school-based PD; collaborate with AACPS and BCPS on sustainability planning; expand teacher leadership activities; offer induction; convene Advisory Board; provide noncredit PD workshop; review Year 3 implementation data. January: Offer noncredit PD; offer undergraduate coursework; provide winter professional learning workshops; review implementation data. Spring: Convene Advisory Board; provide noncredit PD workshop; review Year 2 implementation data. Spring: Continue graduate coursework; graduate participants facilitate coaching, mentoring, and school-based professional learning; offer induction;

continue quarterly professional learning, coaching, mentoring, and family engagement; conduct formative evaluation; recruit for summer clinic; collect and analyze performance assessment data. Summer: Conduct Language and Literacy Summer Clinic; undergraduate and graduate coursework; Undergraduate Cohort 2 completes ESOL endorsement; disseminate project products through conferences, publications, and statewide professional learning opportunities.

Year 5 (2030–2031): Fall: Continue final year of implementation; complete participant preparation activities; continue school-based coaching and professional learning; collect final educator and student outcome data; convene Advisory Board and begin to plan for post-project sustainment; review Year 4 and summative implementation data; offer induction. January: Offer UG coursework; complete induction, coaching, mentoring, and professional learning activities; begin summative evaluation. Spring: Convene advisory board and continue plans for post project sustainment; offer induction; collect and analyze performance assessment data; complete project evaluation; finalize post-project dissemination plans, final conference presentations and manuscripts; recruit for summer clinic. Summer: Conduct Language and Literacy Summer Clinic; final graduate coursework; complete final student outcome analyses; draft final performance report. **Fall 2031:** Submit final performance report.

The comprehensive person-loading chart for the project, depicting effort in days per FTE for all key personnel, can be found in the appendix (Appendix G, Table 4).

(c) Significance. (i) The likelihood that the proposed project will result in systemic change that supports continuous, sustainable, and measurable improvement. ASCENT is designed to produce systemic change by strengthening educator preparation, instructional leadership, and

school-university partnerships in ways that will continue beyond the grant period. Rather than providing isolated PD experiences, ASCENT will embed EBLI throughout preservice preparation, graduate education, clinical practice, induction, and school-based professional learning. This approach not only supports ELs and teachers but creates and improves infrastructure, in schools and within TU, to support English learners across the continuum of need, aligned with state priorities, district needs and increasing the likelihood that evidence-based instructional practices will be sustained after grant funding ends.

Additionally, systemic change will occur through ASCENT's school-based PD, a replicable framework for job-embedded professional learning that combines collaborative needs assessment, instructional coaching, mentoring, and multimedia professional learning. Graduate participants will extend the project's reach by serving as teacher leaders who facilitate professional learning, coach colleagues, mentor beginning teachers, and support implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction within their schools. As these educators assume leadership roles, the project's impact will extend beyond individual participants to influence instructional practice across teams and grade levels within their schools. ASCENT will further support sustainable improvement by developing enduring resources that remain available after the grant concludes, including revised university coursework, multimedia professional learning modules, the OR-EBLI protocol, strengthened instructional materials, and the Language and Literacy Summer Clinic model for ELs. These products, together with strengthened partnerships among Towson University, AACPS, and BCPS, will provide an ongoing infrastructure for educator preparation, PD, and continuous improvement. These

interconnected program elements position ASCENT as a catalyst for sustainable, and measurable improvements long after the grant has ended.

(ii) The importance or magnitude of the results or outcomes likely to be attained **by the proposed project, especially contributions toward improving teaching practice and student learning and achievement.** ASCENT is designed to produce meaningful and lasting improvements in educator practice, instructional leadership, and English learner achievement by preparing educators to implement evidence-based literacy instruction across the continuum of need. The project's significance extends beyond preparing individual teachers to creating sustainable improvements in instructional quality through an integrated continuum of preservice preparation, graduate education, clinical practice, induction, and school-based professional learning. As participants develop expertise in evidence-based literacy instruction emphasizing explicit academic vocabulary development, language-content integration, and differentiated instruction for multilingual learners, they will strengthen their capacity to provide rigorous, linguistically responsive instruction that improves English learners' access to grade-level curriculum and academic success.

A distinguishing feature of ASCENT is its systematic measurement of changes in teaching practice using two complementary performance-based measures. Towson University's TESOL Standards-Aligned Performance-Based Addendum, developed and piloted through a previous National Professional Development grant, will assess participants' demonstration of the TESOL Professional Teaching Standards during authentic clinical experiences. To complement this broader measure of professional competence, ASCENT will develop and implement the Observation Rubric for Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction (OR-EBLI), a practice-based

observation rubric that measures implementation fidelity of the project's evidence-based literacy model. Drawing directly from current research, OR-EBLI will assess four observable pedagogical practices as implemented in authentic environments with EL students in Maryland educational settings: (1) explicit academic vocabulary instruction; (2) multimedia presentation of content accompanied by purposeful discussion; (3) strategic use of writing activities and graphic organizers to strengthen language and literacy learning; and (4) structured peer learning that promotes meaningful academic language use and collaborative learning.

Together, these complementary measures will document educators' professional competence and their fidelity in implementing EBLI in authentic classroom settings. These measures also can be shared with partner districts and the field at large in order to contribute to the existing literature on performance-based assessment for instruction of ELs.

The project's ambitious yet attainable recruitment targets represent another avenue for ongoing systemic change and long-term impact. ASCENT proposes to train 93 preservice and early-career educators and 30 experienced educators, all of whom will receive high-quality preparation, guided and mentored clinical experience and meaningful feedback on teaching. Conservatively assuming that each of those candidates impacts 20 students each year of his or her career, it can be estimated that over the next 20 years ASCENT will positively impact the trajectories of over 40,000 Maryland EL students through improved teacher practice and EBLI implementation. Beyond improving outcomes for students and project participants, ASCENT will contribute a practical, replicable model for strengthening and measuring PD and implementation of EBLI. TU's role as the largest preparer of teachers in Maryland, coupled with enthusiastic support from the State Department of Education and the preparation of teacher-

leaders and teachers who will teach across multiple districts, will allow for improvement of instruction for ELs across districts throughout the state, implementation of EBLI to benefit students throughout Maryland, and improved school and district capacity, leading to sustained contributions to improving teaching practice and student learning.

(iii) The extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project reflect up-to-date knowledge and an evidence-based project component. ASCENT reflects current knowledge in instruction for ELs, evidence-based literacy instruction, educator preparation, and professional learning by integrating research-supported instructional practices throughout every component of the project. The central component of EBLI for ELs (Vaughn et al., 2009) is integrated throughout preservice, early career inservice, and advanced inservice PD as well as school-based PD. The project also reflects current knowledge regarding effective instruction for ELs, offering standards-aligned coursework based in current research on pedagogy, including explicit instruction in elements of language, integration of language and content, vocabulary and comprehension, and opportunities for quality discussion and peer interaction to build academic language for ELs with and without disabilities (Blitz, 2025; Brown, Ryoo & Rodriguez, 2009; Kieffer, Rivera & Francis, 2012; Hall, Steinle & Vaughn, 2019). Coursework-based PD leverages up-to-date practices such as simulation using Mursion, authentic clinical experiences, induction, and performance-based assessment, all of which are widely recognized as effective approaches for improving educator practice (Hollins & Warner, 2021; Mendelson, 2025; Teal et al., 2024). School-based PD reflects current knowledge on job-embedded professional learning by providing ongoing PD, coaching, classroom-based support, and continuous availability and feedback within partner schools rather than relying solely on workshop-based PD (Kraft, Blazar

& Hogan, 2018). ASCENT further reflects up-to-date knowledge and current evidence by preparing educators to support multilingual learners across the continuum of need (IES, 2021), including students requiring core instruction, targeted intervention, and specially designed instruction. Current research emphasizes the importance of appropriate assessment, identification, and integrated service delivery for ELs along the continuum of need, particularly those who may need intensive support (Gottlieb, 2024). Finally, ASCENT incorporates continuous improvement to ensure that services remain aligned with up-to-date knowledge throughout the project period.

(d) Quality of the project evaluation: (i) The extent to which the methods of evaluation or other evidence-building are thorough, feasible, and appropriate to the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the proposed project. ASCENT will deploy a comprehensive evaluation plan designed to assess implementation, participant outcomes, and progress toward each project goal while supporting continuous improvement throughout the five-year grant period. The project leadership and evaluation teams will address the evaluation by taking a utilization focused approach (Patton & Patton, 2022; Ramírez & Brodhead, 2013) to examine the following primary evaluation process and impact questions: 1) To what extent are the proposed project activities implemented as intended (process); 2) Given the project team’s proposed enrollment and retention targets, to what extent are project participants completing all program requirements (process); 3) Upon completion of the program specific elements including the evidence-based PD and induction supports, how have educators demonstrated growth in evidence-based instructional practice (impact); and 4) To what extent are the proposed short- and mid- term project outcomes achieved based on the implementation of the proposed

project activities (impact). These formative and summative evaluation questions will guide the development and deployment of a mixed-method design to gather feedback from project leadership and program participants throughout the life of the grant using data collection elements with managed use in mind (Ramírez & Brodhead, 2013). The adapted utilization focused approach includes steps that data collection elements are developed with the project leadership team with the intended user in-mind (Patton, 2012), ensuring the feasibility and use of the evaluation instruments, which could include pre- post- surveys, open-ended feedback, examination of developed course curriculum and PD materials, review of student course products, and participant interviews. Recognizing that use of evaluation tools and the provision of evaluation feedback does not often occur naturally, the utilization focused approach requires time set aside for the facilitation of evaluation activities (Ramírez & Brodhead, 2013) on a consistent basis throughout the grant. Members of the evaluation team will meet with the leadership team monthly to facilitate the review of project activities and key project deliverables.

Evaluation activities will be conducted with support from the COE's Office of Research and Evaluation in collaboration with project personnel using multiple sources of data aligned with the project's goals, objectives, and logic model. The evaluation team will follow an evaluation matrix (Appendix G), which is used to facilitate the use of the evaluation, offering proposed guiding evaluation questions and a sample of possible evaluation activities useful to offering formative feedback to the leadership team and the funder through quarterly and annual reporting requirements. The proposed evaluation questions and activities proposed in the evaluation matrix would be reviewed with the leadership during the first month of the

project and revised as needed to ensure that evaluation activities are useful, feasible, and appropriate to the needs of the project leadership and implementation team. Given the evaluation is integrated into routine project activities—including coursework, clinical experiences, school-based professional learning, and leadership development—it is both feasible and appropriate for documenting project implementation and outcomes while providing meaningful information to guide ongoing refinement of the project.

(d)(ii) The extent to which the methods of evaluation or other evidence-building include the use of objective performance measures related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quality data that are quantitative and qualitative. ASCENT will utilize multiple objective performance measures that are directly aligned with project objectives and expected outcomes. The project proposes activities that include the development and implementation of high-quality professional development and curriculum that incorporate evidence-based literacy practices. Given the emphasis on high-quality programming, the evaluation team recognizes the intensity of time and resources it takes to develop and implement professional development. Toolkits for evaluating PD such as those developed by the Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) also offer additional resources to guide the evaluation and leadership team through practical steps for evaluating the process and impact of the PD, curriculum and instructional activities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). The leadership team also has a history of creating and implementing course curricula and professional development and has worked with faculty in the COE Office of Research and Evaluation to develop and deploy surveys, focus groups, and record reviews to evaluate the quality and impact of the instructional activities. Adapting instruments from prior experience, utilizing the available

resources from federal technical assistance centers focused on supporting the evaluation of PD, and consulting with faculty in the COE with experience leading and evaluating PD all strengthen the ability to collect, manage and analyze a mix of quality data and its use to further improve the project over the life of the grant. Evaluating the impact of preparation and professional development targets will require a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures to ensure the timely creation and effective implementation of proposed project deliverables along with an assessment of the quality and usefulness of the training in improving the teacher knowledge and applied practice.

Quantitative measures will include participant enrollment and completion, ESOL endorsement attainment, course performance, classroom observation scores, implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction including explicit vocabulary and comprehension development, and student language and literacy assessment data from summer clinic activities. Qualitative evidence will include participant reflections, instructional artifacts, mentor and faculty observations, interviews, and feedback from partner districts and schools, participants, families of ELs and other stakeholders. Together, these complementary measures will provide valid and meaningful information about educator learning, instructional practice, project implementation, and student outcomes while allowing project personnel to examine progress across multiple dimensions of project success.

(d)(iii) The extent to which the methods of evaluation or other evidence-building will provide performance feedback and provide formative, diagnostic, or interim data that is a periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. Emphasizing the importance of a utilization approach to evaluation, the team is specifically focused on the practical application

of evaluation activities to monitor and recommend changes as needed to maintain project success (Gottlieb, 2024). Therefore, the evaluation will be designed as a continuous improvement process that provides regular performance feedback throughout the project period. The evaluation team lead will meet monthly with the leadership team to review progress and gather documentation pertinent to proposed project activities and outputs. Semi-annually evaluation team including project staff and the evaluator will meet with the project advisory comprised of leadership and implementation team members and district partners to review implementation data, participant performance, classroom observations, instructional artifacts, and student outcome measures. These consistent intervals of evaluation check-ins are incorporated into the project management plan (Table 6, prior section) and personnel loading chart (Table 4, Appendix G) and designed to assess progress toward project goals and identify opportunities for improvement. These formative data will inform ongoing refinement of coursework, clinical experiences, induction, and school-based professional learning while supporting timely adjustments to project implementation as needed. Annual and summative analyses will document progress toward intended outcomes and provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of the project's professional development model in improving educator practice and supporting EL success.

GEPA Statement

The Principal Investigator(s) do not anticipate any barriers to participation due to race, sex, national origin, color, disability, or age. Towson University (TU) is a constituent institution of the University System of Maryland and does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, religion, creed, disability, marital status, veteran status, socio-economic status, national origin, race, sex, genetic predisposition or sexual orientation in its education and research programs, services and activities. It provides reasonable and appropriate accommodations to meet the learning and evaluation needs of students, faculty, and other participants. The project team is guided by a clear and thorough recruitment and program implementation plan and prioritizes compliance with federal nondiscrimination laws in recruitment and project implementation. Throughout the project, the project team will direct participants to appropriate University offices and resources to ensure accessibility and participation. For example, participants who are requesting accommodations can register with the TU Office of Accessibility and Disability Services (ADS). ADS is part of TU's commitment to promoting and supporting an inclusive campus to ensure equal opportunity and accessible educational experiences. TU's Title IX office provides support to participants who may require pregnancy-related accommodations or encounter other sex-related barriers or discrimination.