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College Possible: Closing the Achievement Gap for Low-Income Students  
Investing in Innovation (I3) - Project Narrative

**A. Significance: 1. Address Priority 2b Improving Low-Performing schools (non-cognitive)**

College Possible makes college graduation possible for low-income students through an intensive curriculum of coaching and support. The organization’s founder, Jim McCorkell, was inspired to launch the organization based on his own experience as a low-income, first-generation college student. Programming begins with College Prep Talks for students in early high school, continues with intensive programming for juniors and seniors in high school, and concludes with up to six years of support for students as they transition, persist and complete college. College Possible was founded in St. Paul, MN, in 2000 and expanded to Milwaukee, WI in 2008; Omaha, NE in 2011; Portland, OR in 2012; and Philadelphia, PA in 2013.

Utilizing intensive coaching by near-peer mentors, peer group support, and opportunities for academic and non-cognitive skill building, our unique program model closes the achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers. Our proposed strategies and practices have a **record of accelerating improved performance and closing achievement gaps between low-incomes students and their more affluent peers.** (Details attached in Appx C)

<b>Table A1. College Possible Record of Improving Student Achievement</b>		
Performance Measure	College Possible	National Average
Increase high school graduation rates	98 percent of participants graduate from high school	72 percent of economically disadvantaged students nationally graduate from public high schools <sup>1</sup>
Increase college enrollment	85 percent enroll in college the fall following graduation	52 percent of low-income students enroll in college fall after graduation <sup>2</sup>
Increase college completion	57 percent of participants graduated from a 4-year school in 6 years or less	8 percent of students from low-income backgrounds nationwide earn a college degree by age 24 <sup>3</sup>
<sup>1</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Graduation Rates report (April 2014); <sup>2</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, (2012); <sup>3</sup> Postsecondary Education Opportunity, (2013)		

College Possible’s positive results have been confirmed by five independent evaluations, including two Harvard studies (2011 and 2013). The 2013 Harvard evaluation, a randomized controlled trial (RCT) by Harvard Kennedy School professor Dr. Christopher Avery, found that

College Possible has a significant positive effect on four-year college enrollment for low-income students. We are the first college access organization to attempt such a rigorous evaluation. Nationally, only 12 percent of RCTs show a positive finding (Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, 2013). A 2013 evaluation by ICF found that our coaching model has a significant positive influence on college success, **eliminating historical achievement gaps** in persistence.

College Possible was prominently featured in the January 2014 White House report on increasing college opportunity for low-income students. Our program was identified as an evidence-based, innovative solution and we were welcomed as a partner in the administration's plan for closing the degree divide. According to independent social return on investment analysis conducted for the 2011 book *More Bang for Your Buck*, our program model produces a 333% return to society over a student's lifetime. Our strong results have led to numerous awards, including two CollegeKeys Compact Innovation Awards from the College Board and a 2009 National College Access Network Award of Excellence. In 2012 we were inducted into the prestigious New Profit Venture Philanthropy Fund portfolio and awarded \$1 million over a four-year period, recognizing College Possible's position as a solution-driven, scalable non-profit.

College Possible's programming also **complements the broader turnaround efforts of partner schools**. We have a long history of partnering successfully with low-performing schools to address barriers faced by high-need students. Three Minneapolis-St. Paul high schools: Edison (partner since 2009-10), Patrick Henry (since 2002-03) and Humboldt (since 2007-08) were recently removed from Priority/Focus School lists. Patrick Henry also received designation as a 2013 Reward School qualifying in the top 15 percent of Title 1 schools. We continue to partner with the improving schools Humboldt and Edison.

Additional evidence of our whole school impact is found in our College Prep Talks; a program that reaches a large number of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, helping create a whole-school culture focused on college. Prep Talks spark students' interest in attending college, inspire the belief they can go to college, and provide clear steps to helping them prepare. A standardized, interactive curriculum outlines the benefits of college, how to prepare for the admissions process and where to locate resources. Prep Talks are led by trained senior high students, building their confidence as leaders in their school and providing tangible skills they can share on a resume.

Year-end student program participant surveys also confirm our broader impact. Over 90 percent of students strongly agree or agree that because of College Possible they feel better prepared to help others get into college, including children, siblings and other family members.

**Low-Performing Schools:** The project proposes to partner with 19 low-performing high schools located in five major metro areas: Philadelphia, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Milwaukee, Omaha and Portland. College Possible has been serving students in a majority of the partner high schools in four of the sites. Philadelphia area programming will begin in 2014-15. As shown in Tables A2 and A3, all of the partner high schools meet the definition of low-performing schools.

**Philadelphia, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Milwaukee and Omaha partner high schools are among the lowest-performing schools in their state on academic performance measures.**

**Portland partner schools consistently rank near the bottom in Oregon graduation rates - especially concerning given that the state of Oregon has the fourth-lowest graduation rate in the nation.** (<http://www.governing.com/gov-data/high-school-graduation-rates-by-state.html>)

All partner high schools serve a large percentage of high need students as defined in the NIA: students at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty and students who attend high-minority schools. Partner

schools serve high numbers of students of color and students living in poverty - as measured by Free Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) and shown in Tables A2 and A3.

<b>Table A2. Academic Measures: Low Performing High Schools &amp; High Need Students</b>						
State and High School Partners	State Average Proficiency		School Average Proficiency		School demographics: High Need Students	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	FRPL	Students of color
W. Philadelphia HS	68%	60%	19%	13%	95%	99%
Pennsylvania: PSSA 2012-13; <a href="https://webapps.philasd.org/school_profile/">https://webapps.philasd.org/school_profile/</a> <a href="http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/school_assessments/7442">http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/school_assessments/7442</a>						
Columbia Heights HS	58%	52%	35%	24%	75%	72%
Como Park HS			42%	28%	72%	75%
Edison HS			34%	24%	86%	83%
Harding HS			28%	36%	85%	91%
Humboldt HS			13%	19%	93%	93%
Johnson HS			29%	30%	85%	88%
Roosevelt HS			39%	11%	81%	82%
Minnesota: MCA-II/III Spring 2013; <a href="http://rc.education.state.mn.us/#">http://rc.education.state.mn.us/#</a> School Performance						
Alexander Hamilton HS	39%	45%	12%	10%	81%	85%
Morse-Marshall HS			17%	16%	81%	92%
Pulaski HS			9%	6%	85%	91%
Riverside University HS			8%	8%	73%	92%
South Division HS			8%	7%	87%	94%
Vincent HS			6%	7%	84%	97%
Wisconsin: WASA 2012-13; <a href="http://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/Dashboard/portalHome.jsp">http://wisedash.dpi.wi.gov/Dashboard/portalHome.jsp</a>						
Benson HS	77%	69%	33%	21%	81%	70%
Omaha North HS			52%	35%	64%	70%
Omaha South HS			33%	16%	87%	86%
Nebraska: NeSA 2012-13; <a href="http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/pg_NeSA_Details.aspx">http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/pg_NeSA_Details.aspx</a>						

Portland area partner schools consistently rank in the lowest third of the state for high school graduation rates. Over the last four years, both Reynolds and Park Rose High Schools have ranked in the bottom 30 percent when compared to over 200 Oregon high schools. Both schools also serve high percentages of high need students.

<b>Table A3. Graduation Rates: Low Performing High Schools and High Need Students</b>				
Partner School	High School Graduation Rank compared to over 200 Oregon Schools			
	2012-13 Rank	2011-12 Rank	2010-11 Rank	2009-10 Rank
Reynolds High School	20%	23%	15%	31%
Parkrose High School	25%	31%	28%	25%
Oregon Dept. of Ed. <a href="http://www.ode.state.or.us/apps/BulkDownload/BulkDownload.Web/">http://www.ode.state.or.us/apps/BulkDownload/BulkDownload.Web/</a>				

**Non-cognitive Skills:** College Possible programming is supported by a growing body of evidence that **non-cognitive skill development is critical to high-need student success**. As stated in the NIA, and summarized by James Heckman and Tim Kautz in 2013 in their National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper *Fostering and Measuring Skills: Interventions That Improve Character and Cognition*, student engagement and academic outcomes can be increased by improving students’ non-cognitive behaviors, attitudes and strategies. As described in Section B, our model employs research-proven strategies to build non-cognitive skills: mentors who provide intensive supports, cohorts of students in peer groups with other college-focused students, and opportunities for practicing non-cognitive skill building.

## **A2. Novel Approach to Addressing Selected Priority**

College Possible makes college admission and success possible for low-income students through an intensive curriculum of coaching and support; students receive 320 hours of direct service in their junior and senior years. Our program is designed to find students who are good candidates for pursuing college, but who might not do so without additional support. Eligible students have an average GPA of 2.0 or above, an interest in four-year colleges and don’t receive other college program supports. We take a unique approach by utilizing proven strategies, such as mentoring, in an innovative manner. Our program places full-time AmeriCorps service members in schools to provide near-peer mentoring for a cohort of high need students. Mentors utilize a data-driven structure focused on college success to provide academic and non-cognitive skill development. The cohort model creates a community of peer support and expectation of college achievement. Our innovative model significantly improves student outcomes and can be widely scaled.

**Full-time Near-Peer Mentors:** The College Possible model is unique in using a structural framework that includes an essential AmeriCorps collaboration. College Possible hires

AmeriCorps members to serve as full-time coaches to students in high school from Monday-Thursday, with Fridays reserved for training and lesson planning in our offices. Service members are recent college graduates; many are people of color and/or first generation college students, making them especially relatable mentors for the students we serve who share the same background. We've designed an interview process to effectively identify candidates who possess the experience and traits needed to be successful in this role. These idealistic, motivated leaders receive intensive, ongoing training and a structured curriculum. They become powerful messengers, providing services through individual and small group activities, ACT tutoring, workshops and community-building activities. After high school, students move to college-focused services. College Possible was the first in the nation to harness the power of national service for college access and success and prove its effectiveness; the partnership supports several unique design elements critical to student success.

Our approach is novel and can be distinguished from other support programs that are not hosted directly by schools, do not have full-time staff present, or do not have one staff member dedicated to each school. During the week, College Possible coaches meet with counselors, teachers and administrators to ensure alignment with school efforts. Partnerships are especially critical given a chronic shortage of counselors. Research shows that high schools serving low-income and minority students have counselor to student ratios **twice** the national average (White House Report, 2014). While mentors are not a substitute for professional counselors, they can partner with counselors to extend their reach, focusing on students needing additional support. **Cohort model:** Many federal, private or school-based programs operate via a drop-in model, such as a career center where students can stop in and seek help. Because AmeriCorps supports a cost-effective approach, we can focus intensively on an identified group of students, providing

them with targeted coaching, peer group experiences and opportunities for skill building. Our “intrusive advising” approach ensures that we don’t rely on students to recognize when they need help, but can anticipate and address their needs, often before they are aware of them.

**Results-driven approach:** We relentlessly focus on achieving results for our students. A bi-weekly scorecard summarizes all critical programmatic, financial and operational progress against benchmarks. (Appendix J sample scorecard) Coaching teams review real-time data and senior staff members review summary information each month. By effectively managing data, we embrace a data-driven approach to services with a clear understanding of program impact.

**Focus on college success:** Often low-performing schools are challenged to focus on dropout prevention or high school graduation. By explicitly talking about *college* as the goal –the name “College Possible” is visible throughout schools – we raise the bar for students in the program and in the school as a whole, shifting academic engagement and skill-building from an “end” to a gateway to a college education and a brighter future.

### **A3. Develop and Advance the Field**

**Existing Theory, Knowledge and Practice:** Our nation’s future prosperity depends on our ability to prepare and produce college graduates. By 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require some post-secondary training beyond high school, up from 28 percent in 1973 (Georgetown U. Center on Ed. and the Workforce, Recovery, 2013). Currently, only 31 percent of persons age 25 and over have a post-secondary degree (NCES, 2012). Degree attainment rates are not rising quickly enough to meet projected need; by 2020, the United States will be short five million workers with post-secondary degrees (Recovery, 2013). At a time when educational attainment is critical, our nation is falling behind. A generation ago, the U.S. ranked first in the world in four-year degree attainment among 25-34 year olds; today we have fallen to 12<sup>th</sup> (OECD Education at

a Glance 2013). U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated, "In order to achieve President Obama's goal to lead the world in college graduates by 2020, we must work to ensure that everyone has a chance to enroll and complete postsecondary education."

The challenge of increasing the number of college graduates is compounded by changing demographics. The percentage of students from low-income families - students historically less likely to access and complete college - is increasing dramatically. Nationally, the number of students receiving Pell Grants has doubled in the last two decades, increasing from 4.0 million in 1992-93 to 8.8 million in 2012-13 (College Board, Trends in Student Aid, 2013). Despite efforts to close the achievement gap, the U.S. continues to see tremendous disparities in education attainment. Nationally, only 8 percent of low-income young people who graduate from high school earn a college degree by age 24, compared to 73 percent from upper-income families. (Postsecondary Ed. Opportunity, 2013) Nationally, 240,000 low-income students graduate high school prepared for college, but don't go (Georgetown U. Center on Ed. and the Workforce, 2013). If we hope to increase the number of college graduates, we must improve college success for the growing population of low-income students. College Possible helps low-income students improve achievement and close the achievement gap; in January our successful model for increasing college opportunity for low-income students was recognized by the White House.

**Contributing to development and advancement/ building a body of evidence:** As discussed in Section B., a significant body of research documents *the importance of non-cognitive skills* in academic achievement. Additional research documents *the positive impact of certain strategies*, such as mentoring, on college success of at-risk youth (Bruce & Bridgeland, (2014) *The mentoring effect*.) However, research has not been conducted that connects the proposed strategies with increased non-cognitive skill development and academic success.

The proposed project provides an opportunity to rigorously evaluate College Possible’s model and strategies to determine whether and how they help students build non-cognitive skills and ultimately increase academic achievement. While College Possible’s demonstrated success, along with strong theory, supports the conclusion that positive student outcomes are driven by changes in academic engagement and non-cognitive skill-building, **this project will help build an evidence base for the approach**; the results of this study will **add to the body of research** supporting “what works,” particularly in pursuit of the Obama Administration’s ambitious goal to lead the world in college graduates by 2020. In particular, project evaluation will identify which practices work to increase achievement for high need students in low-performing schools. College Possible is also well-positioned to support knowledge-sharing. We are leaders in several national organizations; National College Access Network regularly invites us to present at their annual conference and has given us an Excellence Award. Our founder was on the National Association of College Admissions Counselors board, and we are members of the National Partnership for Educational Access, serving on their national conference planning committee.

#### **B. Quality of Project Design: 1. Articulation of Plan/Actions to Achieve Goals**

The proposed project has identified two broad project goals that are both important and measurable: **High need, low-income students will (1) increase their non-cognitive abilities and engagement in learning, and (2) improve their achievement, closing the education gap between low-income students and their higher-income peers.** As described briefly below and detailed in the evaluation plan, each goal includes measurable objectives and outcomes. Additionally, following a well-developed logic model, the project will conduct a mixed method implementation study with a goal to **(3) evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of key model components including near-peer coaching and college-focused peer groups.**

**Goal 1. Increase Non-Cognitive Development:** Significant research has examined the role of non-cognitive factors in education. The University of Chicago summarized hundreds of studies, examined factors tied to academic success, and identified essential non-cognitive factors. The summary report built a framework of indicators that are critical to academic success, dividing the factors into five general categories: Academic Behaviors, Academic Perseverance, Social Skills, Learning Strategies, and Academic Mindsets. (Farrington, C.A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T.S., Johnson, D.W., & Beechum, N.O. (2012). *Teaching adolescents to become learners. The role of noncognitive factors*. Chicago: University of Chicago CCSR)

Further research documents the non-cognitive or social-emotional challenges common to low-income students. Engle and Tinto (2008) found that low-income students frequently lack confidence in their academic abilities and often experience difficulty navigating institutional systems such as those found in education. Research shows that low-income families tend to trust relationships over systems (Payne, DeVol and Smith, 2011). As discussed further in Section B. Strategies, research supports College Possible’s strategy of creating a caring relationship with coaches who can guide students through challenges and foster a skill-building environment.

Search Institute, a leader in the field of youth development research for over 50 years, has developed a widely-recognized framework of 40 Developmental Assets to identify the external supports and internal strengths young people need to grow up successfully. The proposed project will focus on the internal asset groupings most closely tied to non-cognitive skills including: Commitment to Learning and Positive Identity. These groupings include assets such as achievement motivation, school engagement, a sense of purpose and positive view of personal future. Search Institute’s corresponding survey, the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP), will be used to assess and measure non-cognitive skills changes. ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org))

<b>Table B1 Project Goal 1. Increase non-cognitive skills</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Measure</b>
1.1 Demonstrated increase in high need students' <b>commitment to learning</b> assets (i.e. achievement motivation, school engagement)	DAP survey Assets 21 and 22; College Possible surveys as described in Section D. Evaluation Plan
1.2 Demonstrated increase in high need students' <b>positive identity</b> assets (i.e. sense of purpose, positive view of personal future)	DAP survey Assets 39 and 40; College Possible surveys as described in Section D. Evaluation Plan

**Goal 2. Increase Achievement, Close Education Gap** The second goal of the proposed project is to close the education achievement gap between high need, low-income students and higher-income peers by increasing high school graduation, college enrollment and college completion.

<b>Table B2 Project Goal 2. Improve achievement and close the education gap</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Measure</b>
2.1 High need, low-income students <b>graduate from high school</b> at a higher rate than similar peers	Local Education Agency (LEA) Data
2.2 High need, low-income <b>students enroll in college</b> at a higher rate than similar peers.	National Student Clearinghouse data
2.3 High need, low-income students <b>complete college</b> at a higher rate than similar peers.	Long-term objective will be tracked and measured by CP; however results will not be available during the 5-year grant term

**Goal 3. Evaluate Implementation of College Possible Model Key Components** An independent evaluation, conducted by ICF International (ICF), will include two evaluation questions focused on implementation of the College Possible model as described below.

<b>Table B3 Project Goal 3. Evaluate College Possible Model Key Components</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Measure</b>
3.1 Examine whether key components of the CP model, near-peer coaching and college-focused peer groups, are implemented as intended.	Mixed method implementation study using descriptive statistical analyses for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data
3.2 Examine to what extent the key components provide opportunities for high need students in low-performing schools to practice and develop non-cognitive skills that are essential for student postsecondary success?	

**Theory of Change (Logic Model):** College Possible's Theory of Change rests on the premise that barriers faced by low-income students are mostly identifiable and predictable. By placing students in small groups with other college-focused students and a trained coach, and utilizing a

structured curriculum, measurement and reporting tools, we provide the resources necessary to successfully navigate through high school graduation and college completion. Independent evaluations demonstrate that our model directly reduces the achievement gap that persists along socioeconomic lines and helps participants break the cycle of poverty.

**Strategies to reach Project Goals and Objectives:** College Possible uses a targeted approach that expands the school day and integrates student supports. Our program provides students with support they typically cannot get by addressing the social, psychological, and information gaps that low-income students face, and providing them with the guidance and tools to compete. The College Possible model employs three key strategies to achieve objectives:

(1) **Use of a mentor or coach.** College Possible coaches work with cohorts of no more than 40 high school students, building relationships and facilitating skill building. Coaches provide intensive, targeted support to each student. Near-peer mentors bring useful perspectives and experiences similar to the students they mentor. Participant surveys confirm the important role mentors play in helping develop a positive identity. Over 95 percent of students strongly agree/agree that their coaches increased their confidence that they belong in college, helped them select a college that was a good match, and improved their academic preparation.

(2) **Building a peer group.** Small groups of 12-15 students meet after school and in the evenings for two hours, twice each week. Led by their mentors, students begin their session with check-in questions and community building activities. The cohort size and consistent meeting schedule allow students to build a peer group of support, which research shows is a key factor in student academic success. “Students with larger high school peer groups upon entering college outperform their counterparts with fewer co-enrolled classmates, and they are also more likely to remain enrolled after four semesters” (Fletcher and Tienda, *High School Classmates and College*

*Success*, 2009). These after-school sessions with peers help students increase academic engagement and commitment to learning while creating a sense of belonging.

(3) College Possible’s project design incorporates significant **opportunities for practicing non-cognitive skill building**. For example, as part of ACT preparation, high school juniors spend months dedicating themselves to improving test scores. Participants devote roughly 100 hours to academic tutoring, test preparation and exams – completing a total of four full-length practice exams provided by Princeton Review. Students practice goal setting, utilize academic discipline and grow more confident and engaged as they realize their goals can be met through hard work and persistence. College Possible students increase their ACT test scores by an average of 21 percent over the course of their junior year.

Program strategies are implemented through the following activities and connected to project goals and objectives as outlined in Table B4. (Strategies for reaching Goal 3 Implement and Evaluate Key Components are detailed in Table C1. Project Implementation)

<b>Table B4. Project Activities - Plan for Achieving Goals and Objectives</b>	
<b>Activity (Sessions for Juniors)</b>	<b>Goals:</b>
Building a foundation: juniors introduced to the benefits of college, and their ability to access it	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills G2. Improve achievement; close gap
College research: virtual tours and research colleges	G2. Improve achievement; close gap
College presentation: juniors present their college research findings to their peer group, building individual skills and bonding cohort around college focus	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills
Resume writing: juniors reflect on accomplishments, identify experience gaps, prepare for completing college applications and learn how to market their college-self	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills G2. Improve achievement; close gap
College site visits: students visit at least one college	G2. Improve achievement; close gap
ACT prep: students complete four practice ACT tests (Oct, Dec, Jan March) and a final “real” test (April) building both cognitive and non-cognitive skills (goal setting, persistence)	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills G2. Improve achievement; close gap
Budgeting: introduction to budgeting concepts, financial aid and creating summer budgets	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills
College application prep: juniors learn how to request teacher recommendations and begin developing list of	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills G2. Improve achievement; close gap

top college choices building a positive identify and addressing practical matters of college access	
Letters: juniors write letters of special circumstance, developing writing skills and increasing self-recognition of strengths (grit/positive identity)	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills G2. Improve achievement; close gap
Wrap-up: at end of each semester, students reflect on accomplishments and celebrate successes (supporting motivation, commitment to learning and engagement)	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills
<b>Activity (Sessions for Seniors)</b>	<b>Goal</b>
Professional communication: seniors learn how to communicate with professors, financial aid, admissions	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills
Interviewing and social media: seniors learn how to present themselves both on-line and in person	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills
Selecting target schools: Seniors receive individual support in developing a list of schools to begin the college admissions process.	G2. Improve achievement; close gap
Preparing applications: Seniors prepare college applications, write essays, work with teachers on letters	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills G2. Improve achievement; close gap
Skill building: Seniors have numerous opportunities to practice soft skills like email and phone etiquette	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills
Transition services: seniors are introduced to tools necessary for college success through topics like dealing with stress, time management, self-advocacy, identifying needs, and joining in the college community	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills G2. Improve achievement; close gap
Financing college: seniors learn basics of financial aid, complete FAFSAs, apply for scholarships, and create a college budget	G2. Improve achievement; close gap
Wrap-up: at end of each semester, students reflect on accomplishments and celebrate successes (supporting motivation, commitment to learning and engagement)	G1. Increase non-cognitive skills

## **B2. Plan for Mitigating Risks**

A project of this size and scope (19 partner schools across 8 school districts in 5 states), and with an ambitious evaluation design, holds a number of risks. The following are identified risks to the project plan along with plans to mitigate those risks:

**1) Ongoing support of school leadership.** Our ability to provide student services, as well as to conduct the proposed evaluation, depends on the support of both school and district-level leadership. High need, urban schools tend to see higher turnover in key roles, making ongoing support a challenge. Our management structure is designed to ensure critical school relationships

are managed by an experienced member of our team. We meet with school principals twice per year and with district leadership annually to discuss our work in their schools, share results, and address challenges that have arisen. We also prepare quarterly written communication updates. These consistent communication and relationship management strategies ensure that we have continued strong leadership support even as turnover occurs. Finally, we provide our services to schools at no cost to them, ensuring that schools value our services as an added resource.

**2) Access to required evaluation data.** The ability to gain access to necessary data is critical to project success. Issues surrounding FERPA regulations as well as LEA capacity to provide data could constitute a risk. A particular risk is our ability to administer a survey to a control group of students not receiving project services. Our mitigation plan is as follows: ● Pre-project district participation agreement: Each partner district/school signed a formal letter of agreement supporting this project and agreeing to provide evaluation data. ● Budget for data collection: Knowing the small size of partner school district research offices, funds are budgeted to support district time in collected the needed data. ● Data sharing agreements: College Possible has developed a formalized process for securing data sharing agreements from district partners which has been successfully executed on other grants, including with some of the partners included on this grant. We will utilize the same structure and approach to creating a formalized agreement for timelines, process, and data elements to be shared. ● Plan for survey administration: College Possible's plan for conducting surveys includes the availability of our coaches at each of the partner schools, who are available to assist school staff in ensuring the administration of the DAP to comparison group students as well as the students participating in College Possible services.

**3) New site implementation.** This proposal includes services in one site, Philadelphia, which is entering its first year of services. Including a site without a proven track record could constitute a

risk as staff members involved are still gaining experience with our model and relationships with students and the community are still new. However, this is now our fifth replication site, and through those experiences we have developed strategies to mitigate that risk. We have developed a playbook that accompanies our copyrighted curriculum and our training calendar and plans; these materials help lay out the program model clearly so our proven approach can be replicated in any new site. Our national office staff includes an experienced Program Manager who is responsible for providing guidance, support, and oversight to new sites. This person will work closely with the Philadelphia-based team, holding weekly calls during the first six months of program delivery and bi-weekly calls for the next year or more if needed, to ensure that the team understands the model, has the resources they need, and can ask questions as needed. National staff also regularly travel to all sites, and more intensively to new sites, to monitor program services and provide feedback on the work of each site to ensure fidelity to the program model while also supporting targeted innovation as need is identified to adapt to local site conditions.

### **C. Quality of the Management Plan 1. Key Responsibilities and Timelines**

College Possible utilizes a well-developed copyrighted curriculum to deliver programming to high school students. High school coaches lead after-school sessions at our partner high schools for groups of 12-15 students (a subset of the full 35-40 student cohort). Small groups meet twice each week for two hours over the course of two years. Each coach leads six sessions per week for three cohorts of students. Sessions are aligned with key school-year dates/deadlines and have been developed to address common academic and non-cognitive needs. Coaches are available in the schools during the school day to work with students individually and to build relationships and align program activities with school staff and other after-school program providers.

Programming is designed to help students improve their non-cognitive skills and improve their achievement, increasing high school graduation, college enrollment and completion.

<b>Table C1: Project Implementation - Timeline and Milestones</b>					
<b>Individuals, Major Activities, Targets</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Year 5</b>
<b>Project Administration</b>					
Project Director notifies sites & schools	Jan				
Program Mgrs identify school partner evaluation point of contact (POC)	Jan-Mar				
Independent evaluator (ICF) confirms evaluation design & secures instruments	Jan-Mar				
Site EDs oversee program managers and coaches student participant recruitment	Mar-May	Mar-May	Mar-May		
ICF, with Site Program Managers & school POC, administer evaluations to participating juniors + control group	Sep-Nov	Sep-Nov	Sep-Nov		
ICF, with Site Program Managers & school POC, administer evaluations to participating seniors + control group			Mar-May	Mar-May	Mar-May
<b>Goal 1. Non-cognitive (commitment to learning and positive identity)</b>					
Coaches deliver 320 hours of direct service over two years including: goal setting, vision mapping, role modeling, programs for parents/family, team building as detailed in T. B4 Activities	Sep-Dec	Jan-May; Sep-Dec	Jan-May; Sep-Dec	Jan-May; Sep-Dec	Jan-May; Sep-Dec
<b>Goal 2. Academic Achievement (h.s. graduation, college enrollment/completion)</b>					
Coaches deliver 320 hours of direct service over two years including: college research, tours, presentations and applications; budgeting and financial aid; ACT practice and testing as detailed in T. B4 Activities	Sep-Dec	Jan-May; Sep-Dec	Jan-May; Sep-Dec	Jan-May; Sep-Dec	Jan-May; Sep-Dec
<b>Goal 3. Evaluate College Possible Model Key Components</b>					
Independent evaluator ICF examines whether key components of CP model (near-peer coaching & college-focused peer groups) implemented as intended.		ongoing	ongoing	ongoing	ongoing
ICF will examine if extent key components provide opportunities for high need students in low-performing schools to practice and develop non-cognitive skills that are essential for student postsecondary success		ongoing	ongoing	ongoing	ongoing

## **C2. Key Partners and Stakeholders Support**

The proposed project is strongly supported by key partners and stakeholders. College Possible has longstanding partnerships with many of the proposed 19 high schools/districts and all schools have signed binding Site Agreements that detail the activities that each partner will perform (Appendix A: Memoranda of Understanding). Letters of support (Appendix G) further demonstrate the commitment and enthusiasm of school partners. All high schools have committed to providing office space within their buildings for coaches, facilitating access to students and sharing data as allowed by law.

As detailed in Section D. Evaluation and Appendix F: Resumes of Key Personnel, we will partner with a highly-qualified, experienced evaluator for the proposed project. College Possible also has a long history of private sector funding support based on our record of success with student outcomes. We have secured 100 percent of the private sector match required for an Investing in Innovation grant with funding through the AT&T Aspire High School Success Initiative, the Burke Foundation (Milwaukee), the Claneil Foundation (Philadelphia), the Peter Kiewit Foundation (Omaha) and the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust (Portland). (Available award letters are attached in Appendix G)

## **C3. Feedback and Continuous Improvement**

College Possible's curriculum, program structure and management philosophy have been developed and tested over nearly 15 years. In addition to orientation and training, high school coaches are equipped with a targeted curriculum designed to address low-income students' academic, financial and cultural barriers to college success, and are supervised by a full-time, highly-qualified College Possible staff member who provides support, guidance and feedback through weekly check-ins and regular correspondence. Each coach is issued a laptop and

personal access to a web-based student database, Naviance, through which they track detailed information and progress for each student. College Possible also leads coaches in weekly peer meetings to share resources and develop effective strategies for working with students.

In order to achieve excellent results and run a strong program, College Possible has a strong site-based management structure providing capacity for effective program oversight. Program coordinators directly supervise 6-8 coaches, meeting with them individually on a bi-weekly basis to observe their work with students and provide feedback and support. Program staff members at the site and national offices regularly review student progress to analyze it against benchmarks and organization-wide program goals. (See Appendix J Sample Scorecard) As results become available, they are shared with each site's team at bi-weekly all team meetings and monthly with the entire national team, promoting transparency and accountability and identify what works and areas for improvement. Results are shared with partner high schools and colleges to ensure their awareness of our performance. We also conduct student surveys twice annually to solicit student feedback on how the program can best serve their needs.

#### **C4. Experience of the Project Director**

Traci Kirtley, Director of Programming & Evaluation, will serve as the Project Director. Traci has been with College Possible since 2004, serving first as the Program Director for our flagship Minneapolis-St. Paul location, then becoming the organization's first Chief Operating Officer. Since 2011 she has led the national programming team, overseeing program replication in four new sites and leading the organization to ten straight years of nation-leading outcomes for students. Traci has served as the project director for our federally funded AmeriCorps program for ten years. In this capacity she has managed between \$250,000 and \$975,000 in annual federal funds; in the most recently completed program year this constituted leadership of a team of

nearly 150 FTEs and a budget of \$975,000. Project performance measures have consistently been met each year, and grant compliance has consistently been scored as high.

Prior to her work at College Possible, Traci worked for the government contracting firm Caliber Associates, where she served as project lead for a federal contract of approximately \$250,000 with the U.S. Department of Education and provided key leadership support on several other federal contracts with US ED, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the Justice Department’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. For these projects, she focused her efforts on evaluating and providing training to schools and community organizations receiving federal funds. Traci has a master’s degree in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School, where she studied education policy and organizational management.

**D. Quality of Project Evaluation 1. Key Questions and Methods**

The evaluation of the College Possible (CP) program includes five major evaluation questions, two focused on implementation and three on estimating summative outcomes (See Table D1). Evaluators will use mixed methods for the implementation study and conduct a rigorous quasi-experimental design (QED) study to estimate the two-year impact of CP program participation upon students’ non-cognitive skills, secondary school completion, and postsecondary school enrollment. EQ3 is the confirmatory research question.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Design/Analyses</b>
EQ1. Are the key components of the CP model including near-peer coaching and college-focused peer groups, implemented as intended?	Implementation Study	Mixed method implementation study using descriptive statistical analyses for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data
EQ2. To what extent do key components provide opportunities for high need students in low-performing schools to practice and develop non-cognitive skills that are essential for student postsecondary success?	Implementation Study	
EQ3. What is the two-year impact of CP program participation upon high need students’ non-	Summative Outcome Study	QED study using propensity score

cognitive skills, as measured by the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP)?	(Confirmatory)	matching (PSM) and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM)
EQ4. Do high need students who are CP program participants complete secondary school at higher rates than comparison group students?	Summative Outcome Study (Exploratory)	QED study using PSM and logistic regression
EQ5. Do high need students who are CP program participants enroll in post-secondary institutions at higher rates than comparison group students?	Summative Outcome Study (Exploratory)	QED study using PSM and logistic regression

The primary source of data to address EQ1 will be the *CP Data System (Naviance)*.

Evaluators will collect data including the number of students served, number of contact hours, and other key program indicators specified in Section D.3. Evaluators will also administer an annual *CP Coach Survey* to all coaches and an annual *CP Student Feedback Survey* to all treatment students to measure the quantity and quality of training received by coaches (EQ1), the quality of support provided to students (EQ1), and the extent to which services provided opportunities to practice and develop non-cognitive skills (EQ2). Additional qualitative data addressing EQ1-EQ2 will be collected via annual *CP Coach Interviews* and *CP Student Focus Group Interviews* conducted with a sample of participants each year.

Evaluators will administer the *Developmental Assets Profile (DAP)* to measure non-cognitive skills among treatment and comparison group students both at the outset of their junior year and at the conclusion of their senior year. The DAP measures 40 developmental assets divided into 8 internal and external asset domains. These domains map to non-cognitive skills including persistence, motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience. The overall DAP score will be utilized in the confirmatory outcome analysis (EQ3). *Local Education Agency (LEA) Data* will also be collected, including students’ prior academic achievement, demographic information, and high school completion status. These data will be used in PSM matching for the QED study

addressing EQ3-EQ5 and as an outcome to address EQ4. Finally, we will use data from the *National Student Clearinghouse* to measure post-secondary enrollment (EQ5).

## **D2. Analysis Plan**

Quantitative implementation data will be analyzed using measures of frequency, central tendency, and dispersion. Evaluators will use these metrics to conduct the required i3 implementation study describing fidelity within each participating site and at the overall program level. The evaluation will also contrast implementation across sites and examine changes over time. Qualitative data will be analyzed via a three step process: (1) transcripts are coded by site and stored within a secure analysis package, (2) thematic content analysis is conducted using in-vivo (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and a priori codes drawn from evaluation questions, and (3) thematic summaries are generated to summarize results. (Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. London: Sage) (Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage)

To estimate the impact of two years of CP program participation upon students' non-cognitive skills compared to those of non-participating students (EQ3), evaluators will employ a QED. The study sample will include two cohorts of 665 treatment group students (n = 1,330) who receive coaching services during their junior and senior years. Evaluators will use PSM to identify a matched sample of non-participating students for a total sample size of 2,660 students. Matching will be conducted within each participating school using the following pre-intervention covariates: (1) prior achievement in reading and math, (2) free/reduced price lunch, (3) gender, (4) race/ethnicity, (5) special education status, and (6) English language learner status. The proposed sample size of 2,660 students for the main confirmatory analysis is sufficient to

identify a minimum detectable effect (MDE) of approximately .12<sup>1</sup>, or a small effect, in the confirmatory analysis. The following equation summarizes the 2-level HLM framework. The model estimates the impact coefficient (expressed as  $\beta_{20}$ ) and improves the estimate precision by including important covariates, such as pretest scores, states, predictors used for matching:

$$Posttest_{ij} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{10} * pretest_{ij} + \beta_{20} * treatment_{ij} + \beta_{30} * State... + r_{ij} + u_j$$

where postscripts  $i,j$  index, respectively, student and school;  $\beta$ 's are parameters to be estimated; *posttest* represents a posttest score on the DAPI and *pretest* represents a pretest score on the DAP; *treatment* represents the intervention indicator (1 if the treatment subject, 0 if a comparison subject); *State* indicates a dummy variable representing one of the five states in which schools are located (four of the state variables will be included in the final model); '...' indicates that the model will include multiple predictors and corresponding parameters; and  $r$ 's and  $u$ 's are independently and identically distributed residuals with a mean of 0.

Evaluators will use the following binary logistic regression modeling framework to address exploratory outcomes associated with EQ4 and EQ5:

$$\text{Log}(P/1 - P) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * TREAT + \beta_3 * X.....$$

Where  $P$  stands for probability of a subject to successfully graduate from high school (EQ4) or enroll in postsecondary institution (EQ5),  $\beta$ 's are parameters to be estimated, *TREAT* is a treatment group indicator and  $X$  is an explanatory variable, and "....." indicates that the model will include multiple predictors and corresponding parameters.

### **D3. Key Components & Measurable Thresholds for Implementation**

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<sup>1</sup> Optimal Design used for power calculation: Parameters: Multi-site trial;  $\alpha=5\%$ ; Power=80%; ES variability/school=0, # schools=19,  $R^2$  for schools (blocks) =0%,  $R^2$  for covariates=30%.

Data will be provided to project staff at regular intervals to allow periodic assessment of progress toward achieving implementation thresholds (Table D2). The evaluation will provide formal implementation reports twice during the project period summarizing key findings and including recommendations to improve fidelity. Evaluators will also provide quarterly project management updates and conduct bi-weekly check-in meetings with key program staff to ensure evaluation milestones are being met. A final evaluation report will be completed in Year 5.

<b>Table D2. Key Components, Implementation Thresholds, and Data Sources</b>	
<b>Key Components and Implementation Thresholds</b>	<b>Data Source(s)</b>
<p><b><i>Key Component 1 - Provide Near Peer Coaching in Low Performing Schools:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the conclusion of Year 1, two full-time near-peer coaches will be placed in each of the 19 participating schools for a total of 38 coaches.</li> <li>• At least 80% of coaches will attend required trainings in Year 1 and will report that this training adequately prepared them to serve students.</li> <li>• At least 80% of coaches will attend weekly meetings with their colleagues each year.</li> <li>• At least 80% of coaches will report weekly meetings helped them to share resources and develop effective strategies for working with students.</li> <li>• Each coach will be assigned 35 students in Year 1 and serve an additional 35 students per year thereafter for a total of 175 students served per coach over five years. By the end of the project, 6,650 students will have been served across the 19 participating schools.</li> <li>• At least 70% of students served by the project will attend two, two-hour mentoring sessions with coaches each week. By the end of the project, these sessions will provide 320 hours of service to each student.</li> <li>• 100% of near-peer coaches will report frequently using data regularly to guide student interventions.</li> <li>• Overall, the program will serve at least 60% disadvantaged students for a total of 3,990 students.</li> <li>• At least 80% of CP students will report that that near-peer mentoring services provided opportunities to practice and develop non-cognitive skills including, persistence, motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Key Component 2 - Establish College-Focused Peer Group Student Cohorts:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of CP students will be placed into college-focused peer groups with between 12-15 fellow mentees.</li> <li>• At least 75% of CP students will attend 30 college-focused peer group sessions per year.</li> <li>• At least 80% of CP students will report that college-focused peer group sessions provided opportunities to practice and develop non-cognitive skills including, persistence, motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience.</li> </ul>	<p>CP Data; CP Coach Survey CP Data; LEA Data CP Student Survey and Interviews</p>

<p><b>Key Component 3 – Increase Students’ Non-Cognitive Behaviors and Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the conclusion of their senior year, students in the treatment group will exhibit greater average scores on the DAP when compared with a matched comparison group of non-participating students.</li> <li>• Students in the treatment group will exhibit greater high school completion rates when compared with comparison group students.</li> <li>• Students in the treatment group will exhibit higher postsecondary enrollment rates when compared with comparison group students.</li> </ul>	<p>DAP; LEA Data; National Student Clearinghouse Data</p>
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**D4. Sufficient Resources**

The independent evaluation will be conducted by ICF International (ICF). ICF has provided research and evaluation (R/E) services to a wide variety of clients since 1969. A subcontractor to the What Works Clearinghouse since its establishment, ICF leads syntheses of rigorous research on a variety of topics, and facilitates the Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic. ICF has extensive experience conducting objective R/E studies, including rigorous QED and Randomized Control Trial (RCT) studies. Proposed evaluation staff members have conducted prior research on the CP program and possess deep knowledge of program components and intended outcomes. Additionally, the key ICF staff members proposed for this project currently serve as the evaluators for a 2013 i3 validation grant, and as a result are aware of the technical assistance and program evaluation requirements for the i3 program. Finally, the percentage of the budget allocated to the program evaluation is approximately 12%. Based upon prior experience in conducting evaluations of this scope and size, ICF believes this level of funding to be sufficient to support the proposed activities.