

June 16, 2008

Head Start Research Support Technical Assistance Team
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Grant Review Team
Xtria, LLC
8521 Leesburg Pike, Suite 400
Vienna, VA 22182

Dear Grant Review Team:

The attached proposal is for the Head Start Graduate Research Grant, funding number HHS-2008-ACF-OPRE-YEAR-0068. The proposal is for a 12 month budget period and is entitled *Response to Intervention goes to Head Start*. The proposed project was independently designed and written by myself, Sandra Hess Robbins, a doctoral student from Kent State University. The attached proposal is 75 pages in length, includes 11 appendices, and follows the suggested format.

Letters of approval and support from the Akron Summit Community Action Head Start Agency are included. They are committed to establishing a collaborative partnership. Also included is a letter of support from my faculty advisor and research mentor Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak. Dr. Pretti-Frontczak is an accomplished writer and researcher whose skills and knowledge will be accessed frequently throughout the proposed project. Curriculum vitae for Dr. Pretti-Frontczak and I can be found in the appendices along with my official transcripts.

Additional letters of support from community leaders can be found on Appendix E. All original documents and signatures are available upon request.

Sincerely,

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PROJECT ABSTRACT

There is an urgent need for teacher training to support children with disabilities in inclusive environments. In particular, Head Start personnel feel the urgency due to federal initiatives requiring larger percentages of children with disabilities to be served. Response to intervention (RtI) is a model of tiered instruction that has the potential to meet the needs of all children in early childhood classrooms where ability levels are increasingly diverse. The aim of the proposed project is to introduce an RtI model to Head Start classrooms in an effort to increase teacher use of research based strategies that support the learning trajectories of children with disabilities. Through a collaborative partnership and series of training sessions, the Head Start teachers will learn to utilize a tiered model of instruction to foster optimal outcomes at the classroom as well as individual child level. Fidelity of implementation and child response to instruction are critical components of the proposed project. The proposal was formulated through a collaborative partnership between the Akron Summit Community Action Head Start Agency and Sandra Hess Robbins from Kent State University.

PROJECT NARRATIVE

Need for Assistance

Poverty/Disabilities (Problem)

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2008) 36.5 million people (roughly one in eight) Americans live in poverty. Approximately 13 million of those people are children. Head Start and Early Head Start programs, as well as many other health and education programs have been developed to meet the needs of children living in poverty. In 2007, for example, Head Start served over 900,000 American children and families living in poverty and enrollment continues to increase every year (U.S Department of Health and Human Services,

2008). These numbers are troubling given that children living in poverty are more likely than children in the general population to be born prematurely or with low birth weight, face biological risks, and experience environmental stressors during early childhood (Wall, Kisker, Peterson, Carta, & Jeon, 2006). Further, environmental stress in early childhood is detrimental to children's short and long-term developmental trajectories (Votruba-Drzal, Coley, & Chase-Lansdale, 2004). For example, poverty has negative effects on children's ability and achievement levels (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997), emotional development (Lent & Figueira-McDonough, 2002), literacy skills and trajectories (Kainz, & Vernon-Feagans, 2007; Rauh, Parker, Garfinkel, Perry, & Andrews, 2003), and overall quality of life (Park, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2002). Adding to the complexity of the issues of poverty is the growing relationship between poverty and disability (Fujiura & Yamaki, 2000). Specifically, there are a higher proportion of children with disabilities among poor families than the general population (Wall et al.) and poverty rates are higher in homes where there is an adult with a disability (Saunders, 2007).

Early learning experiences can have significant positive effects on young children's cognitive growth (Campbell & Ramey 1994; Schweinhar, Barnes, Weikart, Barnett, & Epstein, 1993). As a matter of fact, research suggests that high quality early learning experiences may have the most significant impact on reversing the effects of poverty and increasing children's chance of success (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). There is an urgent and critical need for a solution that improves the quality of early learning experiences and provides children who are disadvantaged with an equal chance for school success. Professionals working in early childhood are examining response to intervention as one possible solution to the problem.

Response to Intervention (Solution)

As stated previously, Head Start programs across the United States are devoted to serving a population of children at risk for disabilities, often due to living in poverty, as well as children with disabilities. Head Start professionals are in dire need of evidence based strategies for supporting diverse groups of young children some of whom lack even the prerequisite skills needed for school success. Response to intervention (RtI) is becoming increasingly recognized as a promising means for supporting young children with disabilities in inclusive environments.

Response to intervention (RtI) is a broad conceptual model that has been explored in K-12 and recently introduced to early childhood special education. The major focus of RtI is on prevention. That is, teachers implementing an RtI model provide instructional supports to children at the first sign of learning difficulty, rather than waiting for children to fail. Specifically, the RtI model provides teachers with a structure for matching the right level and type of instruction with children's needs and then for changing that instruction as needed in a systematic way. RtI is comprised of a set of foundational principals, the central principal being a tiered model of instruction. The tiered model of instruction is meant to be grounded in evidence based practices and involves using assessment information to organize children into three groups.

In K-12, the three tiered groups have historically been categorized as (a) tier one: general education (b) tier two: evidence-based instruction and (c) tier three: special education (Fuchs, Buysse, & Coleman, 2007). The K-12 model of tiered instruction is inappropriate for Head Start preschool children because children are being served in inclusive environments where general education and special education cannot be separated and evidence-based instruction is

considered standard for all children. For the proposed study, the three groups of children organized in a tiered model of instruction will be conceptualized as (a) tier one: children working toward universal targets, (b) tier two: children whose skills are emerging and (c) tier three: children who are working on prerequisite skills.

Tiered Instruction

The direct application of RtI is still being conceptualized for early childhood practice (Coleman, Buysse, & Neitzel, 2006; Greenwood, Carta, McConnell, Goldstein, & Kaminski, 2008; Jackson, Pretti-Frontczak, Harjusola-Webb, Grisham-Brown, Romani, in review), but there are several models of tiered interventions being utilized in early childhood (Barnett et al., 2006; Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003; Sandall & Schwartz, 2002). Tiered instruction is conceptualized as a dynamic approach where the intensity, frequency, and intent of instructional efforts will vary between tiers. It is focused on universal outcomes and prevention at tier one, structured support at tier two, and individualized instruction at tier three.

Head Start teachers are charged with meeting the needs of diverse groups all at once, often with little or no support. Tiered instruction provides teachers with an effective strategy by helping them conceptualize the match between each child's need and the appropriate type and amount of instruction. Because tier one practices focus on prevention and aligns with what teachers are already doing in their classrooms, tiered instruction becomes a feasible strategy for meeting the needs of diverse groups of children.

The tiered model of instruction to be used in the proposed project is grounded in evidence based practices and involves using assessment information to organize children into three groups (a) tier one: children working toward universal targets (b) tier two: children whose skills are emerging, and (c) tier three: children who are working on prerequisite skills. From the

assessment information, teachers match the needs of the children at each tier with an appropriate type and amount of instruction. Instruction is defined as the practices, actions, and methods used to deliver academic or developmental content (Jackson et al., in review). While a variety of strategies could be used at each tier, to carefully examine fidelity and to enhance a shared understanding of the intervention decisions made at each tier, the tiered instructional practices have been prescribed for the project.

Assessment. The project will use the literacy portion of the developmental continuum from the Creative Curriculum (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002) to assess children's needs, organize them into tiers, and monitor their progress. The process of using assessment information to organize children into groups is generally deemed as data-based decision making. Data-based decision making is partnered with tiered instruction as another of the core principals of a response to intervention model (Stecker, 2007). According to the National Research Center on Disabilities (2007) effective data-based decision making requires a shared understanding of choices of interventions and the basis on which those intervention decisions are made. The proposed model provides a prescribed approach in order to enhance a shared understanding of the intervention decisions at each tier based on the results of the assessment information.

Tier one. Children classified into tier one (i.e. working toward universal targets) will be assured a well-designed environment in which their skills can grow and develop. In order to maintain a well designed environment, teachers will integrate principals of universal design into an environmental setup structured with best practices in early childhood and early childhood special education in mind (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005).

Tier two. Children classified into tier two (i.e. working on emerging skills) will be assigned to a structured intervention that provides more support than the daily routine, but takes less teacher time than an individualized intervention plan. The prescribed interventions for tier two include peer mediated interventions and embedding schedules. Both strategies are evidence based (Goldstein, Schneider, & Thiemann, 2007; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2004) and provide children with multiple opportunities to engage with the content beyond what they might find by simply navigating the classroom environment.

Tier three. Children classified into the tier three (i.e. working on prerequisite skills) will need individualized support and will therefore have an individualized intervention plan written for them. There is evidence to show that preschool teachers can design, implement, and track children's progress using very basic individualized intervention plans (Grisham-Brown, Pretti-Frontczak, Hawkins, & Winchell, in review). Based on observational information collected about the child, teachers can choose an evidence based intervention to apply. The individualized interventions will take more teacher time than the tier one and two instructional practices, but they will be designed so that teachers can implement in the classroom environment rather than separating children from their peers (Odom & Diamond, 1998)

Teacher Training (Means to the solution)

High quality professional development should be aligned to program goals and designed to meet the needs of program staff (Borko, Elliot, & Uchiyama, 2002; Holler, Callender, & Skinner, 2007). In addition, it should encompass a follow-up component and provide opportunity for observation and assessment of implementation (Garmston, 2003; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). In fact, research has shown that simply showing teachers graphical data collected during classroom visits can improve implementation (Casey & McWilliam, 2008). Finally, high quality

professional development is repetitive, frequent, and sequenced (Garmston; Lewandowski & Moller, 1997). The training series designed for the proposed project was developed to meet the above mentioned standards of high quality professional development and will support Head Start teachers in their implementation of the tiered model of instruction.

Literacy Development (Monitor the effectiveness of the solution)

Research has consistently shown that preschool children from low-income backgrounds demonstrate lower early literacy skills than the general population (Bowey, 1995; Hecht, Burgess, Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 2000; Lonigan, 2004; Webb Schwanenflugel, & Kim, 2004). Children from low-income backgrounds have inferior literacy skills often because of their lack of high quality early literacy experiences in their home environments (Hart & Risley, 1995; Lonigan, 2007). It has been found that an early understanding of literacy concepts predicts children's abilities to read and write in the older years (Phillips, Clancy-Menchetti, & Lonigan, 2008). These findings suggest that early literacy instruction is especially critical for children of at-risk backgrounds if the goal of early education is to close the achievement gap.

The tiered model of instruction to be introduced in the proposed project could be tied to any domain, but literacy was chosen as the most important outcome to focus on because of the critical nature of early literacy development. State and federal mandates including the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (www.hsnrc.org) are requiring improved programming in the area of early literacy. Children in Head Start classrooms are expected to make progress in the areas of, phonological awareness, book knowledge and appreciation, print awareness and concepts, early writing and alphabet knowledge. These early literacy skills are not intuitive or naturally developing abilities, but require deliberate teaching and practice opportunities (Phillips et al., 2008). By implementing a tiered model of literacy instruction the proposed project is leading the

Akron Summit Community Action in a direction that will be increasingly important as the groups of children they serve become progressively more diverse.

Partner Program Description

The Akron Summit Community Action is responsible for overseeing 10 sites with a total of 55 Head Start classrooms serving over 1,300 children and their families. The Head Start teachers in the Akron Summit Community Action use a project approach to early education. The project approach is a set of teaching strategies that enables teachers to lead students through in-depth explorations of real world topics based on child interests. Last year, the Akron Summit Community Action adopted the Creative Curriculum (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002). The Creative Curriculum is an early childhood system developed to provide professionals with ideas for structuring play-based learning environments and assessing children's progress in all areas of development. The Creative Curriculum also has a strong literacy supplement that provides teachers with procedures for structuring learning activities to promote early literacy in the classroom. The teachers intend to blend Creative Curriculum with the project approach in order to address the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework and meet the needs of diverse groups of children. The problem lies in the fact that neither the Creative Curriculum nor the project approach provides the teachers with guidance on how to match different levels of instruction with the individual needs of children. The proposed project will introduce a tiered model of instruction that will support the implementation of the integrated approach to curriculum while helping the teachers individualize instruction for all children.

Results and Benefits

Material benefits to the Akron Summit Community Action include (a) four days of professional development provided by a series of professionals within the community, (b)

follow-up support for 10 classrooms involved in the training series, (c) a creative curriculum literacy supplement (book) for all 55 classrooms, and (d) a narrative data summary report accompanied by a project meeting to address program improvement recommendations.

Project Objectives

There are four major objectives for the proposed project each focused on Akron Summit Community Action program goals.

1. To support curriculum implementation by introducing a tiered model of instruction to Head Start teachers
2. To increase teacher capacity for using assessment information to individualize programming
3. To improve instruction for children with or at risk for disabilities in Head Start classrooms
4. To promote literacy development through a tiered model of instruction

The objectives of the proposed project will be achieved through a collaborative partnership between Akron Summit Community Action and the project director. The project director will play a critical role in introducing the tiered model of instruction and will then guide the teachers to implement the model in the classroom environment. Through a series of training sessions, the proposed project will help teachers utilize assessment information to individualize literacy programming for all children. The individualized programming will be derived from a tiered model of instruction that is grounded in evidence based practices shown to support young children with disabilities in inclusive environments.

Impact

The information obtained from the proposed project will impact the greater Head Start community at the program, classroom, and child levels. The results of the project will inform program practices by providing the administration with a clearer idea of the program capacity for

implementation of innovations and recommended practices. The project director will facilitate a decision making process during the debriefing where the tiered model of instruction will be modified and refined. After debriefing, the program will have a better vision of their training needs and program goals for the following year. On the classroom level, the project will impact teacher knowledge regarding tiered instruction and evidence based practices that are designed to support diverse groups of children. Finally, children in Head Start programs will benefit from the improved instruction and increased teacher capacity to use research based strategies that meet their individual needs.

Dissemination

Information gained from the proposed project will be disseminated through narrative summaries, publications, and presentations. Specifically, the project director will write a paper for publication and develop a presentation for conferences. She will present an overview of the project at the Head Start Graduate Student grantees annual meeting, the projected results at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development in Denver, Colorado (April, 2009), and intends to wrap up the project with a completed dissertation.

Approach

The approach to the proposed project is described below. The guiding questions and design are outlined, the sample and measures are described, and a detailed plan of action is explained. Limitations or factors that might decelerate the work are cited and references to project summary documents are included. The approach concludes with a list of key contributors to the project.

Questions

The proposed project is guided by seven questions. Each question relates to the topic of teacher fidelity, social validity, or child outcomes. The following is a summary of the guiding questions.

Teacher Fidelity

- Can a tiered model of instruction be implemented with fidelity in Head Start classrooms?
- Is the training series effective in improving teacher use of research based strategies?
- Does adding follow-up support to the training increase fidelity of implementation?

Social Validity

- Do teachers find the training sessions to be informative and valuable?
- Do teachers believe implementation of the model is practical and attainable?
- Do teachers see a change/improvement in children's literacy development resulting from implementation of a tiered model of instruction?

Child Outcomes

- Is there evidence of reliable data showing that implementation of a tiered model of instruction advances child progress in literacy development?

Design

The design for the project is framed around the principals and practices of program evaluation which is appropriate for the project given that it is designed to improve program design, effectiveness, and outcomes. According to the Division for Early Childhood (2007), program evaluations (a) focus on program goals, (b) assemble reliable data (c) evaluate desired outcomes (d) involve a collaborative partnership, and (f) facilitate decision making about the

program. Using a variety of research methods, complex issues such as capacity, fidelity, and sustainability can be addressed through program evaluation in an effort to guide continuous improvement plans.

Program Evaluation

Focus on program goals. The proposed project is guided by a logic model (see Appendix A). Best practice in early childhood special education, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, the Head Start Performance Standards, and the unique needs of the Akron Summit Community Action were incorporated in the development of the logic model. Specifically, the project outcomes will lead to program goals including providing high quality instruction to children with disabilities and improving curriculum implementation.

Assemble reliable data. Formative and summative evaluation procedures will be utilized throughout the project. Specifically, demographic data will be summarized to evaluate the impact of individual, family or school characteristics on the project outcomes. Environmental ratings will be reviewed at the end of the project to determine whether the increase introduction of a tiered model of instruction had any impact on classroom characteristics that might affect child outcomes. Teacher fidelity data will be collected monthly, reviewed, and shared to determine the effectiveness of the training and feasibility of the model and social validity rubric ratings will support an examination of teacher perceptions.

Evaluate desired outcomes. Using a variety of measurement techniques, the project outcomes will be evaluated to determine the degree to which they were met. Please refer to the evaluation section to review the assessment procedures for the project outcomes. Demographic, environmental, developmental, fidelity, and social validity measures will be utilized.

Collaborative partnership. A collaborative partnership between the Akron Summit Community Action and the project director will be utilized throughout the implementation of the proposed project. At the start of the project, the principal investigator, the project director, and the Akron Summit Community Action will engage in a project meeting to organize the project objectives and timeline. Akron Summit Community action will be involved in the participant recruitment and the development and validation of measures for the project and will serve as partners in the organization of the training sessions during the training phase of the project. Periodic updates and project reports will be provided upon request.

Facilitate decision making. A debriefing session will be held at the close of the project during which the project director, principal investigator, and the Akron Summit Community Action will review the results and work together on developing next steps for continuous improvement. Specifically, the group will examine the effectiveness of the tiered model of instruction and determine whether the teachers and administration support its continuation. The data will be reviewed and the perspectives of the participants will be outlined in an effort to define the situation and make decisions about programming.

Sample

The sample for the proposed project was derived from a purposive sample (i.e. sites supervised by the Akron Summit Community Action) and includes 55 classrooms and over 1,300 children. Training will be provided for all of the 55 classroom teachers. In order to keep data management manageable, 20 randomly selected classrooms will also participate in the data collection phases (see phases 2 & 4). Further, 10 of the 20 classrooms will be randomly selected to receive follow-up support (see phase 3). The 10 teachers collectively serve approximately 250 children.

Measures

Five types of measures will be used to address the guiding questions and objectives outlined above (a) demographic, (b) environmental, (c) developmental, (d) fidelity, and (e) social validity. The project director and research assistant will be responsible for conducting each of the assessments. All information will be kept entirely confidential and ethical research guidelines will be strictly followed (American Psychological Association, 2001).

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire will be distributed by the project director at the start of the project. Because the questions address both teacher and child variables, information will be requested from both teachers and families. Information such as gender, race, disability status, education, and work history will be requested.

Environmental Observation

The Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool for Preschool (ELLCO PreK) will be used to evaluate the classroom literacy environment before and after the training phase of the project (Smith, Brady, & Anastasopoulos, 2008). The ELLCO PreK classroom observation was developed to address early literacy experiences or classroom features that are known to support literacy development. The ELLCO PreK is an extension of the ELLCO research edition that has been researched in more than 308 classrooms in lower-income communities. The reliability analysis shows good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .83 and the data suggests that the classroom observation is both stable and sensitive to interventions that target literacy (Smith et al.).

Literacy Development Rubric

The literacy development rubric from a supplement to the Creative Curriculum toolkit entitled *Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach* (Heroman & Jones, 2004) will also be used. The literacy supplement to the Creative Curriculum provides a more in depth approach to supporting children's literacy development than the Creative Curriculum alone and consists of activities and instruction focused solely on improving literacy instruction in the classroom. As a benefit of participation in the project, each teacher will receive a copy of the literacy book.

The literacy rubric will be used during the project to monitor children's progress and to organize children into groups within the tiered model of instruction. The teachers will be provided with a demonstration of how to utilize the rubric as a means for sorting children's needs into related instructional tiers. Essentially, the teachers will evaluate each child's present level on the developmental continuum. Based on findings noted on the continuum, children will be assigned to three groups (a) children working toward universal literacy targets, (b) children whose literacy skills are emerging, and (c) children who are working on the prerequisites to early literacy. Before the start of the project, the literacy rubric will be validated by early childhood education experts.

Fidelity Checklist

The fidelity checklist will serve as the core evaluation tool for the proposed project. The checklist consists of items related to the tiered instructional practices and will be used to determine whether teachers are successfully implementing the model. The checklist, developed by the project director, will be subjected to expert validation. Each item on the checklist is rated on a scale of 1 to 3 with a score of one (1) indicating no evidence of the practice being in place, a score of two (2) indicating minimal evidence of an emerging practice, and a score of three (3)

indicating sufficient evidence of the practice being in place. See Table 1.1 for sample items from the fidelity checklist.

Table 1.1

Sample Items from the Fidelity Checklist

Level	Sample items
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The classroom teacher has completed the literacy development rubric for each child • The children have been organized into three groups based on the results of the literacy development rubric
Tier 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a daily schedule posted in a place that is accessible to all children • The daily schedule is represented in multiple ways and children have a variety of opportunities to practice and follow the schedule
Tier 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding schedules or peer mediated intervention plans are in place for all children assigned to the second tier • The embedding schedule includes the daily classroom activities and target skills for the child or children, and clearly outlines the embedded learning opportunities for each
Tier 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An intervention guide is written for each child assigned to the third tier that incorporates individualized instruction within the classroom environment (i.e. no pull out) • Instructional strategies outlined in the individual plans are tied to evidence from professional wisdom, literature, or research

Social Validity Survey

The purpose of any social validity process as well as that of program evaluation is to provide information that will ensure program survival (Schwartz & Baer, 1991). In order to evaluate teacher perceptions of the model (treatment acceptability), the social validity survey will be provided to all participants after the training phase of the project. The project director incorporated critical social validity components in the development of the measure (refer to Table 1.2 for sample items) and will access support from Kent State University and the State Support Team to obtain expert validation. Items are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 with a score of one (1) indicating complete disagreement, and a score of five (5) indicating complete agreement.

Table 1.2

Sample Items from the Social Validity Survey

Sample items from the social validity survey

- The tiered model of instruction is a good match for our program
 - Implementing the tiered model of instruction was easy
 - I'm looking forward to continuing the tiered model of instruction next year
 - The training sessions were sufficient for learning the tiered model of instruction
 - The children in my class benefited from implementing the tiered model of instruction
-

Session evaluation. A session evaluation is a social validity tool, used to evaluate the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of professional development training sessions. Typically in the form of a questionnaire, the evaluation is given to participants at the end of a training session to obtain feedback on the quality of the training. To determine teacher

perceptions of the training series in the proposed project, a session evaluation will be collected from each participant at the end of each professional development session. The project director has completed a number of professional development series in the past and has session evaluations that have already been developed and field tested. An expert validation of the chosen evaluation tool will be used to ensure a good match with the proposed project.

Plan of Action

The scope and detail of how the work will be accomplished is outlined below. There are five phases to the proposed project. Each phase will be described in terms of the activities taking place and the people responsible for those activities. To see a table outlining a chronological timeline of the major activities and deliverables for each phase of the proposed project, please refer to the project summary chart in Appendix B

Phase 1: Recruitment, Development, and Validation

Recruitment. Upon notification of an award, a project meeting will be held between the Akron Summit Community Action, the principal investigator, and the project director to review the plan of action and project objectives. After the meeting, the project director will send the teacher and family consent forms and demographic questionnaires to each Head Start center for distribution. The consent forms will outline the project objectives and describe the responsibilities and benefits of each participant using the Kent State University Institutional Review Board approved format. Participants will have one month to review and return the consent forms and demographic forms before the second phase of the project begins.

Development and validation. The measures described earlier will be developed and/or validated during phase 1. Various measures will be used to evaluate the program and observe the contributing factors, but the main focus of the proposed project is to examine teacher

implementation of a tiered model of instruction and to determine the supports needed to accomplish fidelity.

Phase 2: Before Training Data Collection

The fidelity checklist will be completed by the project director and her research assistant for the 20 teachers participating in the project. The project director and her research assistant will collect data on 2 classrooms a day for 10 days. Each classroom will also receive a rating on the PreK Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) tool. Appointments will be scheduled ahead of time with the participating teachers. In the case of teacher absence, appointments will be rescheduled. The project director and her research assistant will maintain 80% reliability on at least 20% of the fidelity checks and classroom observations.

Phase 3: Training Phase

A total of 55 teachers (the entire Akron Summit Community Action) will be invited to participate in the training series. In order to keep data collection manageable, 20 of those 55 teachers will be randomly selected to participate in the data collection process. Further, 10 of those 20 teachers will be randomly selected to participate in the follow-up support process.

Training. Training sessions will take place on the first Friday of each month (January through April). Fridays are the regularly scheduled professional development days for the Head Start teachers so the training schedule will be a good match for the Akron Summit Community Action group. Each session will be 6 hours in length with an hour break for lunch and all 55 classroom teachers will be invited to attend all of the sessions (see Table 2.1 for a summary of the content for each training session). Materials for the training sessions have already been developed and field tested with other groups of early childhood professionals. Only minor adjustments will be necessary to align the content of the materials with the needs of the program.

Table 2.1

Summary of Training Series Content

Training	Summary of content
Session	
Session 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the Creative Curriculum as a response to intervention model. • Response to intervention alignment with early childhood practices • Using assessment information to organize children into groups • Using the literacy development rubric • Introduction to instructional practices
Session 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier one activities and instructional practices – for ALL children • Setting up a high quality environment and incorporating universal design for learning (Sarah Jackson* will co-present) • In depth look at what a universally designed classroom should entail • Ensuring the positive behavior support program** is made an integral part of the daily routine
Session 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier two activities and instructional practices • Developing and incorporating embedding schedules and peer-mediated interventions (Kathleen Harris and Dr. Pretti-Frontczak will co-present***) • Fundamental components of each practice • Practical strategies for busy teachers

Training	Summary of content
Session	
Session 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier three activities and instructional practices • Supporting children with intensive needs • Designing a simple intervention plan • Individualizing instruction • Strategies for identifying evidence based practices • No prior training on teaching children with disabilities necessary

*Sarah Jackson is the Early Learning and School Readiness Coordinator at the State Support Team Region 8. She has extensive knowledge and practice with universal design for learning

** The Head Start program has a positive behavior support plan in place. The Akron Summit Community Action requested support on maintaining the plan.

*** Kathleen Harris is a doctoral candidate from the Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Research and Training at Kent State University. She has researched and presented extensively and on the topic of peer mediated interventions. Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak is the principal investigator from Kent State University. She is the lead author and architect of embedding schedules (Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2004).

Follow up. After training sessions 2, 3, and 4, the fidelity checklist will be completed by the project director and her research assistant for the same 20 teachers that participated in the data collection before the training. Literacy development rubrics will also be collected for children in each of the 20 classrooms. During the data collection visits, follow-up meetings will be held with half of the sample (10 teachers). The meetings will be conducted by the project director and her research assistant and will consist of an observation where the teacher will be

rated on the fidelity checklist, and a follow-up meeting where the teacher will be shown his/her rating and will have the opportunity to discuss suggestions for continuous improvements with the project director. Anecdotal records of the meetings will be kept by the research assistant.

Phase 4: After Training Data Collection

The fidelity checklist will be completed one last time by the project director and her research assistant for the 20 teachers participating in the data collection during phases 2, 3, & 4. In addition, the literacy development rubrics will be collected for children in each of the 20 classrooms and each classroom will receive a rating on the PreK Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) tool. The project director and her research assistant will collect data on 2 classrooms a day for 10 days. Appointments will be scheduled ahead of time with the participating teachers. In the case of teacher absence, appointments will be rescheduled. The project director and her research assistant will maintain 80% reliability on at least 20% of the fidelity checks and classroom observations.

Phase 5: Dissemination

Data analysis. Information from the demographic, environmental, developmental, fidelity and social validity measures will be recorded and summarized using numerical or narrative formatting. Descriptive and inferential statistics will be used to classify and summarize the quantifiable data in a clear and understandable way. Data will be analyzed on both the child and teacher participants and separate statistics will be run for each unit of analysis.

Graphical displays, tabular descriptions, and summary statistics will be used to examine the results of the data collection. In addition, t-testing will be used to compare means of the group receiving training and the group receiving training plus follow-up assuming the population distribution is normally distributed (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Finally, the qualitative data such as

the anecdotal records from the follow-up meetings and the commentary on the session evaluations will be coded according to the perspectives of the participants and interpreted in a narrative summary (Bogden & Biklen, 2003).

Project Meeting. Program evaluation is based on the assumption that at the end of the project the evaluator will facilitate a decision making process for the program. The information gained through the project will be reviewed at the debriefing meeting at the end of the project. During the meeting decisions can and will be made regarding next steps in an effort to improve Head Start literacy practices in the future.

Project summary

Please refer to the logic model in Appendix A for a summary of project outputs. The logic model outlines the project resources, activities, quantitative outputs, outcomes and impact in an easy to follow diagram. The person loading chart in Appendix C identifies the personnel responsible for the project activities and the amount of time in days each person will commit to each activity.

Limitations/Decelerations

Time and budget

The allotted timeline and budget set certain limitations on the project as far as what can be accomplished. Given that the proposed project is outlined as a dissertation, the timeline and budget have been adjusted to fit the schedule and additional obligations of the project director in order to make completion feasible. The project director is committed and will complete all project activities on time and within budget. Given more time and money, the project director would like to have integrated an on-line learning community as a means for teachers to problem

solve together through the implementation and maintenance of the intervention. Packaging the training materials for other Head Start programs to access could have also been included.

Teacher absence

Teacher absence can decelerate a project when data collection relies on the teacher being present. Teacher fidelity data cannot be taken without the teacher. Data collection sessions for the proposed project will be scheduled with the classroom teachers ahead of time. The project director and her research assistant will telephone the centers before making trips to classrooms to ensure teachers are available. The visits will be rescheduled in the case of teacher absence. If a teacher absence interferes with one of the training sessions, the teacher will be contacted within one week and time will be scheduled for the teacher to access the training materials and ask questions of the project director. Each of the four training sessions will be posted electronically for easy access.

Snow days

Snow days are a very real threat to decelerating any school based project in Northeast Ohio. Training sessions, data collection, classroom observations, and follow-up support may need to be rescheduled in the event of a snow or ice school closure. Trainings will be initially scheduled for the first Friday of each month. In the case of school closure, trainings will be rescheduled for the following Friday. Classroom observations for data collection and/or follow-up will be rescheduled with the classroom teacher at his/her earliest convenience.

Key Contributors

- Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Research and Training (CEECRT), Kent State University
 - Support for expert validation of measures

- Recruitment of research assistant
- Individuals: Kathleen Harris, peer mediated intervention specialist will co-present;
Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak, mentor & embedding schedule architect will co-present
- Early Learning and School Readiness Team, State Support Team Region 8, Ohio Department of Education
 - Support for expert validation of measures
 - Connections with Head Start administration and policy council
 - ELLCO training for project director and research assistant
 - Individuals: Sarah Jackson, universal design for learning specialist will co-present

Evaluation

Each of the project objectives will be evaluated in order to determine the degree to which they are met. There are four major objectives for the project. The methodology and criteria that will be used to evaluate each objective is outlined below.

1. To support curriculum implementation by introducing a tiered model of instruction to Head Start teachers

Generally speaking, if the project is completed as planned, the tiered model of instruction will have been introduced to the Head Start teachers and objective number one will have been met. Whether the teachers were able to put the model to use is another dimension of the objective.

Teacher fidelity. Twenty of the Head Start teachers will be observed and rated monthly on the fidelity checklist to determine the extent to which the teachers are implementing the tiered model of instruction. The fidelity ratings will be analyzed using descriptive statistics. High fidelity ratings would suggest teachers understood and were able to implement the model.

Because the tiered model is a method for implementing the Creative Curriculum high fidelity ratings would also suggest that curriculum implementation had been supported.

Social validity. Social validity measures are used to ensure consumer buy in which in turn results in intervention maintenance. It is important to question whether teachers found curriculum implementation was supported through the introduction of a tiered model of instruction. Participant responses on the social validity survey will be categorized and interpreted in order to determine the extent to which they believed the model was supportive of their program goal to implement a blended curriculum

2. *To increase teacher capacity for using assessment information to individualize programming*

Teacher fidelity. To determine whether teacher capacity increased throughout the duration of the project, teacher fidelity data will be examined over time. Fidelity ratings will be collected before, during, and after the intervention phase of the project. While the project timeline is too limited to look for statistically significant changes, the project director expects to see change in the fidelity data over time. As part of the fidelity checklist, teachers will be rated on whether or not they were able to develop programming for individual children based on the literacy development rubric ratings. An increase in teacher accuracy suggests an increase in teacher capacity.

3. *To improve instruction for children with or at risk for disabilities in Head Start classrooms*

Teacher fidelity. The project aim is to improve instruction by giving teachers who are not trained to teach children with disabilities strategies for supporting children with disabilities in their classrooms. In order to determine whether or not services are being improved, the teacher fidelity checks will be used to examine the extent to which the Head Start teachers are

implementing the tiered model of instruction. Because the tiered model of instruction is evidence-based, improved fidelity ratings will suggest improved instruction.

Social validity. An important and often under appreciated dimension of evaluating the degree to which services have improved for children with disabilities is to obtain the opinion of the classroom teacher. Classroom teachers are often the first to notice when a change in instructional practices had a positive effect on the children. The social validity survey given to all participants at the end of the project will be used as a tool for measuring improved services. If teachers indicate an improvement in child outcomes due to instruction the results suggest an improvement in instruction.

Child outcomes. Perhaps the most straightforward measure of improved instruction is child outcomes. Statistically significant changes in child outcomes may not occur within the timeframe, but within a tiered model of instruction, response to intervention is expected immediately, particularly after implementation of tier 2 and 3 interventions. The project director expects to see immediate child progress through the examination of the literacy development rubrics. The rubric ratings will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine if child change is evident with the implementation of the tiered model of instruction.

4. To promote literacy development through a tiered model of instruction

Child outcomes. Determining whether the tiered model promotes literacy development can be accomplished by reviewing the child ratings on the literacy development rubrics. The rubric ratings will be analyzed using descriptive statistics. If child ratings increase on the developmental continuum then the some evidence that the model promoted literacy development will be obtained.

Environmental factors. It will be difficult to determine the degree to which the child outcomes are a result of the tiered model without reviewing changes in the environment. The Early Learning and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) will be used to determine whether the tiered model of instruction was effective in also producing a change in the environment. Because the ELLCO examines evidence of environmental factors known to promote literacy development, increased scores on the rubric after the training will support the idea that the tiered model of instruction was a key component in the promotion of literacy development in the classroom.

Staff and Position Data

A biographical sketch and job description for each key person appointed to the proposed project is below. The principal investigator and project director are the appointed project personnel to date. A job description for the vacant position of research assistant is also included.

Project Personnel

The qualifications of the project personnel are delineated below. Please refer to Appendix C for a person loading chart outlining the project personnel, project activities, and time (in days) personnel will be committed to each activity. Appendices E and F contain additional information on the qualifications of the project personnel.

Principal Investigator

The principal investigator (PI) for the proposed project will be Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak. Dr. Pretti-Frontczak's role will be to assist and support the project director in the planning, implementation and analysis phases of this project. Dr. Pretti-Frontczak will meet with the project director weekly or bi-weekly, as needed, to provide mentoring support. Her experience conducting research, writing, and publishing, as well as her contacts with the

partnering Head Start agency, will be extremely beneficial. (See the Person Loading Chart in Appendix C for a detailed description of Dr. Pretti-Frontczak's role in each grant activity).

Dr. Pretti-Frontczak is a full faculty member of the Department of Educational Foundations and Special Services at Kent State University and the director of the Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Research and Training. Dr. Pretti-Frontczak is currently the co-PI on a federally funded doctoral training grant and in the past has been the PI and/or co-PI on several model development, personnel preparation, and research funded projects. Her lines of research focus on the grant proposal topics, thereby increasing her ability to successfully mentor Mrs. Robbins during her dissertation. Specifically, Dr. Pretti-Frontczak had conducted in-service trainings around the world on the topic of assessment and tiered instruction, is a national leader in terms of pre-service and in-service training, has worked closely with Head Start Programs throughout Ohio and Kentucky, and publishes widely in peer refereed journals. Based on her current and past research grants, she will be able to serve as a mentor for the project director throughout the project, sharing her expertise on professional development, consultation, and planning and conducting research.

Project Director

Sandra Hess Robbins will serve as the project director for the proposed project. As the project director she will be responsible for the major project activities including teacher training, data collection, and follow-up support. The collaborative partnership and communications with the Akron Summit Community Action will be directed and facilitated by Mrs. Robbins.

Mrs. Robbins has provided an assortment of teacher training for public school preschool teachers, Head Start teachers, and child care providers. In addition to providing professional development, she has also presented at local, state, national and international conferences and

taught at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Mrs. Robbins integrates principles of adult learning and exercises universal design in her presentations.

Mrs. Robbins has a range of experiences with data collection and research through projects conducted with colleagues and faculty from Kent State University. Research topics have included early intervention, naturalistic language interventions, preschool systems development, and quality of life. She has utilized both qualitative and quantitative research methods and has experience using statistical software to analyze data. Mrs. Robbins also has experience consulting groups of teachers and collaborating with administrative teams. As an early childhood consultant for the state support team she worked with preschool leadership teams to support quality improvements and provided consultation on topics such as selecting a quality curriculum framework, effective progress monitoring, and transitioning students. Many of the teams Mrs. Robbins worked with during the 2007-2008 school year were focusing on curriculum implementation and thinking about bringing response to intervention to preschool.

Mrs. Robbins has experience working with children and families. She has provided in-home respite care, center-based child care, and taught in preschool and public schools. She has conducted parent training on responsive interaction and worked with families to conduct assessments. The majority of Mrs. Robbins' experiences have involved working with young children with disabilities and their teachers and families.

Research Assistant

The primary role of the research assistant will be to assist with data collection and data entry. The research assistant may also be asked to occasionally attend updates with the project director and principal investigator to ensure a focus on priority goals. The person to fill the research assistant position for the proposed project will be determined by the availability and

interest of graduate students from Kent State University. The Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Research and Training and the State Support Team are beneficial partners to have for the project as both organizations have agreed to support the search process for a qualified research assistant with experience in early childhood and particularly in Head Start classrooms.

Organizational Profile

Please refer to appendix D for proof of non-profit status for Kent State University.

Letters of Support

Please refer to Appendix E for letters of support from community leaders involved with supporting early childhood professionals. The first letter is from Sarah Jackson the Early Learning and School Readiness Coordinator from the State Support Team Region 8. Sarah Jackson serves as the liaison between the Ohio Department of Education and the preschool programs in Medina, Portage, and Summit County. Sarah Jackson has a long standing positive relationship with the Akron Summit Community Action and has offered her support for the duration of the project. The second letter is from Dr. Sanna Harjusola-Webb from the Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Research and Training at Kent State University. Dr. Harjusola-Webb has a strong research background in improving literacy instruction in community child care centers and has also offered her support for the duration of the project.

Budget

The budget for the proposed project is outlined below. Personnel and travel costs are where the majority of the funding will be allocated. The required ACF sponsored meetings are included. Training and assessment materials are also requested.

Project Title: *Response to Intervention goes to Head Start***Budget Period: 10/01/08 – 9/30/09**

Personnel	Hours	Rate	Year 1
Mentor – Kristie Pretti-Frontczak @13.25 days @8 hrs/day @\$0/hr	106	0	\$0
Doctoral student – Sandra Hess Robbins Full Time Graduate Assistantship			\$11,176
Graduate Assistant – TBN @19.5 days @8 hrs/day @\$12/hr	156	12	\$1,872
TOTAL PERSONNEL			\$13,048
Fringe Benefits			
Faculty 16% workers comp, medicare, retirement			\$0
Group Insurance			\$0
Graduate 1% workers comp + insurance			\$1,223
Dissertation II fees			\$272
Assistant 1% workers comp			\$19
TOTAL FRINGE			\$1,514
Travel			
Local travel for data collection 2 x 50 trips @ 35 miles ea	3500	.505	\$1,768
Local travel for training sessions 4 trips @ 70 miles ea	280	.505	\$141
Total local travel			\$1,909
Annual Head Start Grantee Meeting Washington DC (doc student – Sandra Hess Robbins) Per Diem @ \$265/day	Days 3	Rate 265	 \$795

Airfare @ \$400 round trip		400	\$400
Transp @ \$50		50	\$50
Annual Head Start Grantee Meeting Washington DC (mentor – Kristie Pretti-Frontczak)			
Per Diem @ \$265/day	3	265	\$795
Airfare @ \$400 round trip		400	\$400
Transp @ \$50		50	\$50
Society for Research in Child Development Conference Denver, CO (doc student – Sandra Hess Robbins)			
Per Diem @ \$189/day	3	189	\$567
Airfare @ \$400 round trip		400	\$400
Transp @ \$50		50	\$50
Society for Research in Child Development Conference Denver, CO (mentor – Kristie Pretti-Frontczak)			
Per Diem @ \$189/day	3	189	\$567
Airfare @ \$400 round trip		400	\$400
Transp @ \$50		50	\$50
Total national travel			\$4,524
TOTAL TRAVEL			\$6,433
Supplies			
Creative Curriculum Literacy supplement 55 @\$33.96			\$1,868
ELLCO PreK User’s Guide and Tools			\$260.00
Training supplies (flipcharts, markers, binders, refreshments, etc.)			\$277.00
TOTAL SUPPLIES			\$2,405
Other			
Duplication training session handouts ;fidelity checklists; social validity survey; evaluation forms; literacy rubrics; consent forms; project reports			\$600
Stipends for training series co-presenters 4 sessions @ \$250			\$1,000
TOTAL OTHER			\$1,600
TOTAL BUDGET			\$25,000

Budget Justification

The total budget costs for the proposed project are \$25,000. The justification of the proposed budget outlines how each of the categorical costs was derived. The necessity, reasonableness, and allocation of the project costs are described below.

Personnel

Principal Investigator

Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Foundations and Special Services in the University's College of Education, Health, and Human Services, will serve as the principal investigator for the proposed project and will commit 13.25 days (approximately one half month – 7% FTE) to the project during the 12 month timeline. Dr. Pretti-Frontczak's efforts on the project will be subsidized by the Department.

Project Director

Sandra Hess Robbins will serve as the project director for the proposed project as an appointed Graduate Research Assistant, (100% FTE for 9 months). The projected rate for the start date of the project is \$11,176 for the year, which is the Department's rate for a full-time doctoral level research assistant. Mrs. Robbins will donate any amount of time above and beyond paid hours in order to complete the project.

Research Assistant

One graduate student will be hired as a research assistant to assist with data collection, follow-up support, reliability checks, and data entry. The graduate student will commit 19.5 days (156 hours) to the project during the 12 month timeline. The grad student will be paid a rate of \$12 per hour for the 156 hours committed for a total of \$1,872.

Total Personnel

Total personnel costs are \$13,048.

Fringe Benefits

There will be no cost to the project for fringe benefits for the principal investigator. Fringe benefits will be paid for the project director and the research assistant. The project will cover 1% workers compensation for the research assistant and the project director will receive 1% workers compensation plus insurance at a rate of \$1,223 for the year. Kent State University post-candidacy dissertation fees will also be covered for the project director. Total fringe benefits costs are \$1,514.

*Travel**Local*

Local travel money will be used to reimburse the project director and research assistant for travel to the Head Start centers. The average round-trip mileage from Kent State University to Akron Summit Community Action centers is 35 miles. The project director will also be reimbursed for travel from her home in Cleveland to Akron Summit Community Action for four training sessions. The average round trip mileage from Cleveland to Akron is 70 miles. Both the project director and the research assistant will use privately owned vehicles and will be reimbursed at the Kent State University standard rate of 50.5 cents per mile. Total local travel costs are \$1,909.

National

National travel money will be used to reimburse the project director and principal investigator for travel to the two mandatory ACF sponsored workshops (the annual meeting for

Head Start Graduate Student grantees in Washington, DC & the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development in Denver, CO). The trip to Washington is budgeted at \$1,245 per person for hotel, per diem (\$265/daily), airfare (est. \$400/each) and transportation (\$100 total) and the trip to Denver is budgeted at \$1,017 per person for hotel, per diem (\$189 per day), airfare (est. \$400/each) and transportation (\$100 total). Each trip is budgeted for three days travel.

Total Travel

Total travel costs are \$6,433.

Equipment

No funds are requested for equipment. Any necessary equipment such as a projector for the training sessions will be borrowed from Kent State University or the State Support Team, or provided by the principal investigator or the project director.

Supplies

Purchase of the Creative Curriculum Literacy Supplement for 55 teachers is budgeted at \$1,868, with a per-unit cost of \$33.96. The teachers will be using both assessment and intervention information from the book and will each need a copy. The book will also serve as incentive to participate in the project. Purchase of the ELLCO PreK User's Guide and Tools is budgeted at \$260. The ELLCO will be used to measure environmental factors before and after the training phase of the project. Training supplies such as flipcharts, markers, or binders are budgeted at \$277. Total supply costs are \$2,405.

Other

Grant funds will be used to cover duplication of forms for the training sessions and assessments. A total of \$600 is requested for duplication. Stipends for the training series co-

presenters will also be covered under the project. \$250 is requested for each of the four training sessions. Total “other” costs are \$1,600.

Indirect Charges

Indirect costs will be waived on this project. The required acknowledgement by the University’s Authorized Organizational Representative follows here.

Non-Federal Resources

Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak’s time on the project, as described under Personnel, is being supported by the Educational Foundations and Special Services Department. Her commitment of 13.25 days (approximately one half month – 7% FTE) is based on a projected salary for the upcoming academic year of \$66,860. Corresponding benefits of workers compensation, group insurance, retirement, and Medicare, total \$1344. This totals \$5887 in non-Federal resources devoted to the project.

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