WACO ISD EDUCATION FOUNDATION
COVER SHEET – PART II
Application for Grant:
2026-2027 Funding Cycle

Assigned Grant Proposal #: 5

Project Title: Expanding the Minds through Real World Application

Grade Level(s): 6 **# of Students DIRECTLY involved:** 200

Subject Area(s): Research Course

Amount Requested: $ 10,000.00

Grant Focus Area(s): In order to be considered, Waco Education Foundation Innovation Grant proposals must fall under one or more of the E4 focus areas: early childhood development, enhanced programming for advanced students, extended education for staff, and emphasis on student performance. NOTE: In addition to meeting one of the E4 focus areas above, grant readers are especially interested in creative and innovative grant requests that target fine arts, STEM, literacy, or enrichment.

(check all that apply)

- ☐ Early Childhood Development
- ☑ Enhanced Programming for Advanced Students
- ☐ Fine Arts
- ☐ Literacy
- ☐ Extended Education for Staff
- ☐ Emphasis on Student Performance
- ☑ STEM
- ☐ Enrichment

Proposal #5
Expanding the Minds through Real World Application

Project Description:

This project seeks to implement the NuMinds Curriculum, a research-based instructional framework designed to move beyond rote memorization and toward deep, passion-driven exploration. By utilizing NuMinds' "Real-World, Integrated" (RWI) model, we aim to provide 200 more gifted and high achieving students with enrichment experiences that bridge the gap between academic standards and real-world application. Securing this grant will enable Waco ISD to strategically integrate the NuMinds curriculum with high fiscal efficiency, ensuring a sustainable and cost-effective rollout across the district.

Rationale:
To ensure consistency across the district, the proposed program will adopt the NuMinds curriculum currently utilized by the ATLAS program at Tennyson Middle School. This alignment guarantees that Gifted and High-Achieving students at Cesar Chavez and G.W. Carver receives the same high-caliber, rigorous STEM instruction as their peers, effectively closing the opportunity gap between campuses.
A primary advantage of the NuMinds model is its focus on non-consumable materials. Unlike traditional STEM kits that require expensive annual refills, these resources are a one-time investment designed for multi-year use.

Goals:
The goal of implementing the NuMinds curriculum is to move beyond traditional rote learning and provide gifted and high-achieving learners with a "low floor, high ceiling" environment. This means the tasks are accessible but have infinite potential for complexity, keeping advanced students intellectually stimulated.
NuMinds focuses on divergent thinking—the ability to generate creative solutions to open-ended problems. While standard curricula often focus on finding the "one right answer" for a test, NuMinds encourages students to explore multiple pathways, a skill essential for high-level STEM careers and leadership roles.

Plan of Operation:

Phased Implementation Schedule

To ensure program quality and sustainable growth, the elective will be rolled out using a tiered approach:

- **Phase I (2026-27):** Grade 6 implementation at Cesar Chavez and G.W. Carver.
- **Phase II (2027-28):** Expansion to Grade 7.
- **Phase III (2028-29):** Expansion to Grade 8, completing the 6–8 vertical alignment.

4. Communication & Dissemination:

Public Showcasing & Community Engagement

To celebrate student achievement, WISD will host high-visibility events throughout the academic year including a WISD Innovative Middle School Symposium and Pop-Up Stem Labs.

The WISD "Innovate Middle" Symposium: An annual district-wide event where students from all three middle schools (TMS, Chavez, and Carver) present their research and STEM prototypes to community members, local engineers, and business leaders.

Pop-Up STEM Labs: During PTA meetings or "Meet the Teacher" nights, students will lead live demonstrations of their NuMinds modules, acting as "Student Ambassadors" for the program.

5. Evaluation

We will measure the program's success in preparing students for advanced secondary pathways:

- **Pre-AP/Dual Credit Tracking:** Monitor the percentage of participating students who enroll and maintain a "B" average or higher in Pre-AP/Honors courses once they reach 9th grade.
- **Mastery of STEM Standards:** Analysis of student performance on the **12-week NuMinds Summative Assessments**. We aim for 90% of students to achieve "Mastery" or "Exemplary" ratings on their project rubrics.
- **Standardized Growth:** Comparison of STAAR Science and Math growth scores between students in the Research Elective and a control group of similar high-achieving learners from previous years.

6. Long Term Implications:

The long-term implications of this grant go far beyond a single elective course. By embedding this curriculum at Cesar Chavez and G.W. Carver, you are fundamentally shifting the academic trajectory for students who have historically been underserved in advanced STEM pathways.

Currently, a "zip code" disparity exists where students at one middle school have access to high-level research tools while others do not. Long-term, this project creates district-wide equity. By the time these students reach high school, the playing field is leveled; students from all three middle schools will enter 9th grade with the same foundational "soft skills"—critical thinking, project management, and collaborative inquiry.

Research shows that students who engage in "productive struggle" and advanced research in middle school are significantly more likely to:

- Enroll in AP/Dual Credit: They have already mastered the "Research" mindset, making the jump to college-level work in high school feel like a natural progression rather than a shock.
- Persist in Rigorous Tracks: Because they've spent 12 weeks a year failing and iterating in STEM modules, they develop the academic resilience (grit) needed to stay in difficult Pre-AP or Dual Credit courses when the content gets tough.

Since you are purchasing non-consumable supplies, the $42,864 investment has a diminishing "cost per student" over time.

By starting in 6th grade, we are catching students during a critical window when their "STEM Identity" is formed. Long-term, this creates a pipeline of Waco ISD graduates who are not just "college ready" but "career ready" for local industries in engineering, healthcare, and technology.

Key Personnel:
The individuals responsible for this grant/project would include the following:

- WISD Advanced Academics Director, Paula Miller
- Research Course teachers from both campuses TBD
- Campus POC-Admin who oversees Advanced Academics at each campus

Budget Narrative:

The total cost of Numinds for two campuses is 42,864. This grant would allow consumable materials and curriculum to be purchased in order to decrease the amount of funding from WISD Advanced Academics, as well as the two campuses that will utilize the program.

Please see the attached budget.

Waco Education Foundation

Grant Budget Form

Assigned Proposal #	5
Project Title:	nding the Minds through Real World Appl
Number of Students Served by Grant:	

Qty	Budget Item	Verify Vendor (Y or N)	$ Requested from the WISD Foundation	Other Secured Source	$ from Other Source (if applicable)	Total Amount
	Consumable Supplies					
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
	total Consumable Supplies		$ -		$ -	$ -
	Technology					
						$ -
						$ -
	total Technology		$ -		$ -	$ -
	Long-Term Supplies / Equipment (items that will last beyond the grant year)					
	Non-consumable supplies	Y	$ 7,800.00			$ 7,800.00
	Curriculum	Y	$ 2,200.00	AA local budget	$ 414.00	$ 2,614.00
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
	total Long-Term Supplies		$ 10,000.00		$ 414.00	$ 10,414.00
	Contracted Services					
						$ -
						$ -
	total Contracted Services		$ -		$ -	$ -
	Personnel					
						$ -
						$ -
	total Personnel		$ -		$ -	$ -
	Travel / Other					
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
						$ -
	total Other		$ -		$ -	$ -

Totals	**Total Requested from the WISD Foundation**	**Foundation Cost Per Student**	**Total from Other Sources**	**Total Cost of Project**
	$ 10,000.00	**#DIV/0!**	**$ 414.00**	**$ 10,414.00**