



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

Assigned Grant Proposal #: _____

Project Title: _____

Grade Level(s): _____ # of Students DIRECTLY involved: _____

Subject Area(s): _____

Amount Requested: \$ _____

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

#92 - Daily Grinds & Big Dreams: A Stepping Stone to Independence

Project Description:

Daily Grinds & Big Dreams: A Stepping Stone to Independence is a student-led coffee cart operated by middle school students in the ACHIEVE (Functional Academics) and SAIL (Social Adaptive Interpersonal Learning) education programs. Operating weekly, students manage all aspects of the business—taking orders, preparing beverages, handling money, tracking inventory, and delivering to staff. The program transforms the school hallway into a real-world learning lab where students practice functional academics, communication, collaboration, and vocational skills. Through structured supports and role rotation, students build independence, confidence, and workplace readiness while applying IEP goals in an authentic, meaningful environment that prepares them for high school and beyond.

1. **Rationale:** "Daily Grinds & Big Dreams" aligns with the Waco Education Foundation's focus as a Creative Classroom Project by transforming a traditional instructional space into a dynamic "living lab." While standard curricula often rely on simulations, this student-led coffee cart provides an authentic vocational environment in which ACHIEVE and SAIL students apply functional academics in real time. By managing inventory, calculating totals, and navigating social interactions, students participate in a high-interest project that serves as a Reward for Results—where the successful delivery of a product provides immediate, tangible reinforcement of mastery over complex IEP goals. To maximize leadership development, students will collaborate on all aspects of the project and be assigned as project managers for different operational areas. These management roles will rotate throughout the year, ensuring that every student gains a variety of experiences and a comprehensive understanding of business operations.

This initiative is deeply rooted in the District and Campus Improvement Plans, which prioritize post-secondary readiness and successful transitions for students with disabilities. By introducing vocational training at the middle school level, the project directly addresses the district's goal of increasing the number of "Transition Readiness" benchmarks. The curriculum for the coffee cart integrates Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in mathematics and professional communications, ensuring that students are not just performing tasks but also meeting rigorous academic standards tailored to their developmental levels.

The need for this project stems from the "application gap" often experienced by students in specialized programs; while they may master a skill in a desk-to-teacher setting, they often struggle to generalize those skills in the community. Our school requires a bridge between the classroom and the workforce to build student stamina, social confidence, and independence before they reach high school. Furthermore, the project addresses a campus-wide need for an inclusive culture. By positioning students in the ACHIEVE and SAIL programs as entrepreneurs and service providers, we shift the campus narrative from one of support to one of contribution, fostering a sense of belonging and pride that is essential for long-term student success.

Goals: The primary goal of Daily Grinds & Big Dreams: A Stepping Stone to Independence is to equip ACHIEVE and SAIL middle school students with the functional academic, vocational, and social skills necessary for a successful transition to high school and increased independence. To accomplish this, the project first focuses on strengthening functional academic skills by requiring students to apply math and literacy through authentic practice. We expect students to accurately count currency and calculate change with at least 90% accuracy by year-end, while maintaining inventory logs and fulfilling digital or paper orders with minimal adult prompting. By moving these skills out of a textbook and onto the coffee cart, students transform abstract concepts into the tangible tools of commerce.

Beyond academics, the project is designed to improve communication and social interaction skills within a professional context. Using personalized sentence stems and visual supports, students are expected to greet customers, confirm orders, and complete transactions appropriately in 4 of 5 opportunities. This real-world "lab" encourages appropriate eye contact and active listening during staff interactions, while simultaneously increasing self-advocacy as students learn to independently request clarification or assistance when challenges arise. These "soft skills" are further reinforced as students develop vocational and employment readiness by rotating through assigned project manager roles—including beverage preparation, delivery, and inventory—with increasing autonomy and a commitment to punctuality and reliability.

Finally, "Daily Grinds & Big Dreams" seeks to strengthen critical thinking and promote a culture of collaboration and ownership. Students will be expected to apply reasoning skills to operational challenges, such as determining efficient delivery routes across campus or adjusting to unexpected supply shortages. This collaborative framework requires students to work cooperatively to support one another's strengths while expressing creativity through the design of seasonal menus and promotional marketing. Through these measurable goals, the project provides consistent, data-driven opportunities for growth, ensuring that students demonstrate the pride, confidence, and real-world readiness necessary to meet the academic and vocational demands of high school and beyond.

Plan of Operation: "Daily Grinds & Big Dreams" is a student-led vocational venture operated by middle school students in the ACHIEVE and SAIL programs, designed as a year-long "living lab" that transforms school hallways into a professional workspace. The project utilizes a gradual release instructional model—moving from teacher modeling to guided practice and eventually full student independence—to ensure students build confidence as they manage every facet of a small business. While the primary student-led service occurs weekly, the project also features a "Top Off Your Mug Monday" initiative. This pre-school, self-serve station allows staff to fill their own mugs for a small donation, providing students with early-morning responsibilities in station setup, sanitation, and donation tracking before transitioning into their structured weekly shift. Beyond the typical school day, students will also have the opportunity to set up and sell at

various school events, such as the campus Chili Cook-Off and school concerts, providing them with high-energy, diverse experiences in event logistics and community-facing service.

The project focuses on three core developmental pillars: business operations, communication, and creative marketing. To improve functional academic skills, students engage in digital and paper order collection, beverage preparation, and financial tracking. These activities are supported by visual task analysis checklists and a rotating Project Manager system, where students cycle through roles such as Barista, Cashier, and Inventory Manager to ensure a variety of experiences. Simultaneously, students develop professional communication and social competency by greeting staff, clarifying orders, and navigating customer service hurdles using visual cue cards and adaptive communication tools. These structured interactions are designed to meet specific IEP goals, such as achieving 80% accuracy in money handling and increasing self-advocacy. Finally, the project promotes ownership and collaboration through student-led brainstorming sessions, in which participants design seasonal menus, promotional flyers, and coffee cart branding, fostering a deep sense of pride in their contributions to the campus community.

The success of this operation relies on a multi-layered support system involving school and community partners. On-campus, the project collaborates with administration for logistical scheduling, event coordination, and faculty members who serve as both "invested customers" and feedback providers. By participating in larger campus events such as concerts and cook-offs, students bridge the gap between their specialized classroom and the broader student body, fostering a culture of true inclusion.

Recognizing that independence must extend beyond the classroom, parental involvement is a cornerstone of this initiative. Families are integrated through an initial information meeting to align school goals with home expectations, followed by monthly "Grind Gazette" newsletters that highlight student milestones and skill acquisition. Parents are invited to volunteer during special event service days—including the aforementioned concerts and chili cook-offs—to experience the coffee cart firsthand. Furthermore, the program provides families with specific opportunities to reinforce functional skills at home, such as following multi-step recipes or practicing money handling, ensuring that the vocational progress made at school translates into increased independence in the students' daily lives.

Detailed Timeline / Calendar:

August - September – Planning & Preparation

- Secure funding and purchase equipment/supplies
- Develop menus, branding, and order forms
- Train students in safety, hygiene, and foundational skills
- Send out parent newsletter

October – Soft Launch

- Practice sessions within the classroom
- Role-play customer service scenarios
- Pilot coffee cart and “Top Off Your Mug Monday” with limited staff participants
- Collect baseline data on student performance

November–December – Full Implementation (Fall Semester)

- Weekly Monday operations begin
- Rotate student roles
- Track IEP-aligned skill progress
- Launch seasonal fall/winter marketing campaign

January – Reflection & Expansion

- Review fall data and adjust supports
- Introduce new menu items
- Provide refresher training after winter break

February–April – Continued Operations

- Weekly operations continue
- Introduce student-led problem-solving meetings
- Invite community guest speakers
- Implement a spring-themed marketing campaign

May – Culmination & Evaluation

- End-of-year family celebration event
- Collect final performance data
- Student reflection presentations
- Program evaluation and sustainability planning for the next school year

Communication & Dissemination: To ensure the success of this initiative is recognized and celebrated, we have developed a comprehensive plan to engage our supporters and share our results. We view the Waco Education Foundation as a vital partner and are committed to providing high levels of visibility for their investment. We extend a standing invitation for Foundation and Board of Education members to visit our "living lab" on any Monday to see the students in action. We will also coordinate and communicate specific high-impact photo opportunities, particularly during high-energy community events like the campus Chili Cook-Off or school concerts, where the impact on student independence will be most visible. Additionally, we are eager to present our grant results at a formal Board of Education meeting, where our student Project Managers can personally share their growth stories with district leadership.

We will also collaborate with the district's communications team to produce a "Student Spotlight" feature for WISD-TV that showcases the vocational journeys of our ACHIEVE and SAIL students. Our monthly digital newsletter, the "Grind Gazette," will be distributed to parents and school administration on updates on academic and social progress. By sharing our successes through these channels, "Daily Grinds & Big Dreams" will serve as a district-wide model of innovation and inclusion, demonstrating the incredible capabilities of our students to the Foundation, the Board of Education, and the community at large.

Evaluation: To determine the effectiveness of Daily Grinds & Big Dreams, the project will utilize a comprehensive evaluation plan that combines quantitative data, qualitative feedback, and direct alignment with Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. Quantitative success will be measured through bi-weekly data collection focused on functional academics and communication. Specifically, we will track student accuracy in counting currency and calculating change. Additionally, growth in social competency will be monitored using teacher-created rubrics that record prompt levels—ranging from full assistance to complete independence—across various social interactions. By documenting the reduction in adult prompting over time, we can provide clear, measurable evidence of each student's journey toward autonomy in professional greetings, active listening, and self-advocacy.

Vocational and employment readiness will be evaluated through a structured monthly rubric that assesses workplace behaviors such as punctuality, task completion without redirection, and the ability to successfully pivot between different project manager roles. This data will be supplemented by qualitative indicators, including staff feedback surveys regarding service quality, student self-reflection journals, and parent surveys collected during semester celebrations. These diverse data points allow us to capture the "soft skills" and confidence gains that standardized testing often misses, providing a holistic view of the program's impact on student self-esteem and peer collaboration.

The program's operational success and sustainability will also be monitored through financial tracking and campus engagement levels. At the conclusion of the school year, all collected data will be synthesized into a final impact report for campus administration, the Board of Education, and the Waco Education Foundation. This report will highlight the percentage of students who met their transition-aligned IEP goals and provide a data-driven narrative of how the coffee cart served as a successful bridge to high school readiness. Through this rigorous, multi-faceted approach, we will ensure that the project is not only an engaging activity but a highly effective instructional tool with long-term benefits for our students.

Long-term Implications: The long-term implications of Daily Grinds & Big Dreams: A Stepping Stone to Independence extend far beyond the 2026–2027 school year, as the project is intentionally designed to be a permanent fixture of the ACHIEVE and SAIL vocational curricula. Initial grant funding will establish foundational infrastructure by purchasing durable, high-quality equipment that will serve multiple students for years to come. Once these startup costs are covered, the program's sustainability will be driven by its own operations; ongoing coffee cart sales and donations from the "Top Off Your Mug Monday" initiative will replenish consumable supplies. To further ensure environmental and financial sustainability, we have incorporated a "Bring Your Own Mug" (BYOM) initiative where teachers can drop off their personal mugs in the morning with their orders. This practice drastically reduces waste from single-use plastics and paper, and by offering participants a discounted price, we teach students about tiered pricing and eco-friendly business incentives. Students will be directly involved in this process, participating in budgeting and financial tracking to ensure the business remains self-sufficient, which reinforces the real-world economic lessons at the heart of the project.

Beyond financial and environmental sustainability, the program offers profound long-term impacts for our students, their families, and the district. By embedding this project within the life skills curriculum—supported by structured lesson plans, visual aids, and rotating leadership roles—we ensure that the program remains a consistent training ground rather than a temporary activity. For students, the long-term benefit is a significant head start on transition readiness; they will enter high school with documented vocational experience, increased social confidence, and foundational workplace behaviors that generalize to home and community settings. This early exposure directly increases their preparedness for future supported employment and independent living. Furthermore, the success of this initiative will provide a replicable model for inclusive, student-led programming that can be scaled to other campuses, fostering a lasting culture of contribution and capability throughout the entire Waco ISD community.

Key Personnel: The success of Daily Grinds & Big Dreams: A Stepping Stone to Independence relies on a collaborative team of qualified educators and campus partners who provide the structured instruction, supervision, and oversight necessary for student success. The Special Education Teachers serve as the primary coordinators and program leads, bringing a combined 40 years of teaching experience to the project. Having both previously taught at the high school level, these educators possess a unique "backwards-design" perspective; they have a deep understanding of the specific vocational and social benchmarks expected of 8th-grade students as they transition into more rigorous high school programming. Furthermore, one lead teacher has successfully operated a small-scale student business at a former campus, bringing invaluable firsthand knowledge regarding the logistical "pitfalls" and operational challenges of student-led commerce. This veteran expertise ensures that lesson plans, role rotations, and budget management are handled with a high degree of professional foresight.

Supporting the daily operations are the Special Education Paraprofessionals, who provide direct, hands-on student support during preparation, service, and delivery. Their primary responsibility is implementing task analysis and the "gradual release" prompting model, which encourages students to move toward independence while maintaining safety and hygiene standards. These professionals are specifically trained to support students with diverse learning needs using visual aids and sentence stems, and they play a critical role in the weekly documentation of student progress. Finally, by working in tandem, this team of seasoned educators creates a secure, professional, and highly informed environment where ACHIEVE and SAIL students can safely explore their potential as employees and future community leaders.

Budget Narrative: To ensure the project is financially transparent and aligned with its educational goals, the budget for Daily Grinds & Big Dreams is strategically designed to provide the foundational infrastructure for a permanent vocational program while ensuring immediate operational success. The primary expenditure is a commercial-grade mobile utility cart, which serves as the physical hub of the business. This durable piece of equipment is essential for navigating campus hallways during weekly service and transitioning to high-traffic school events such as the campus Chili Cook-Off and concerts. To meet our objective of 80% accuracy in functional math and financial literacy, the budget includes a simplified Point-of-Sale (POS) system and tablet. This technology provides students with a modern, age-appropriate interface

to manage digital orders, track sales data, and calculate change, mirroring the tools used in professional hospitality environments.

To support our environmental sustainability goals, the budget allocates funds for heavy-duty coffee pots, reusable thermal airpots, and specific "BYOM" (Bring Your Own Mug) signage. By incentivizing the use of personal mugs through a tiered pricing model, we create a sustainable financial impact by reducing recurring costs for single-use plastics while teaching students about eco-friendly business practices. These tools are critical to our "gradual release" model, providing the necessary scaffolding for ACHIEVE and SAIL students to transition from guided teacher support to independent management of the business. To foster a professional environment, students will wear branded aprons while on duty, serving as a visual cue for both the students and the campus that they are in their professional roles. This uniform helps build a sense of identity and pride, reinforcing the social competency goals of greeting staff and navigating customer service hurdles with confidence. Finally, the remaining funds are used to purchase initial inventory—including coffee, cups, tea, individual creamers, and stirrers—ensuring students have the quality supplies necessary to launch a successful venture.

Waco Education Foundation Grant Budget Form

Assigned Proposal #	92
Project Title:	s & Big Dreams: A Stepping Stone to Inc
Number of Students Served by Grant:	75

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						
2	Domino Sugar Packets (100 count box)	Y	\$ 13.96			\$ 13.96
2	16oz Coffee Cupsw lids 100 pack	Y	\$ 52.00			\$ 52.00
1	English Breakfast tea bags (100)	Y	\$ 12.38			\$ 12.38
1	Green Tea Bags (100)	Y	\$ 8.99			\$ 8.99
2	Decafe Tea Bags (50)	Y	\$ 8.64			\$ 8.64
3	Multi Pack Creamer pods (150 per box)	Y	\$ 88.65			\$ 88.65
2	Community Coffee Ground (6 pack/12ozs)	Y	\$ 90.84			\$ 90.84
1	Crystal Ware Plastic Sip Stirrer (1,000 count)	Y	\$ 6.73			\$ 6.73
2	Decafe Community Coffee Ground (6 pack/12ozs)	Y	\$ 93.08			\$ 93.08
total Consumable Supplies			\$ 275.46		\$ -	\$ 375.27
Technology						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Technology			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Long-Term Supplies / Equipment (items that will last beyond the grant year)						
2	SYOB 45 Cup Urn Commercial Grade Coffee Maker	Y	\$ 111.54			\$ 111.54
4	Norme 2Pcs Thermal Coffee Carafe	Y	\$ 147.96			\$ 147.96
3	WDT Heavy Duty Rolling Utility Cart	Y	\$ 269.97			\$ 269.97
3	Hangable Desktop Trash Can	Y	\$ 41.97			\$ 41.97
1	Bulk Aprons (15 count)	Y	\$ 32.99			\$ 32.99
						\$ -
total Long-Term Supplies			\$ 604.43		\$ -	\$ 604.43
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
			\$ 949.76	12.66346667	\$ -	\$ 979.70