

## Project Scope, Purpose, Overview, Outcomes & Objectives, Goals

1-888-288-9667 | EdVISTA Cares, Inc. PO Box 1330, 4645 Log Hill Road Ridgeland, SC 29936



### **EdVista Cares Scope of Work:** Mission, Focus, Audience Served

EdVISTA CARES, Inc. is a non-profit education organization whose passion is to serve disadvantaged (501)(c)(1) public schools helping students in the rural southeast master the “secrets of learning” and succeed in life. We foster meaningful learner-centered environments that engage hearts and minds through differentiated instruction and problem-solving modalities. This curriculum propels students to achievement as they *learn by doing*, rather than simply *learn about* content. EdVISTA CARES’S breakthrough program dramatically increases student efficacy, academic proficiency, graduation rates, and workplace readiness and changes the school culture. We evaluate all students and provide professional development programs that promote a collaborative community of professional educators who will teach for deep understandings of transferable big ideas and core competencies. Our proven student-centered approach develops critical reasoning tools to navigate a fast-changing, digital world.

### **Purpose of the Project:** Impact on Decreasing Children’s Vulnerability

Within the current national school culture and, critically, in the target areas of South Carolina, many often find no place for their talents: students with learning disabilities are marginalized; children from different home-cultures feel disconnected from academics; gifted individuals are bored, unchallenged, and misunderstood; non-traditional learners feel frustrated and anxious about learning. A generation of vulnerable students is being left behind (e.g., NAEP report: about 36 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> graders cannot read at a basic level). Prospects for gainful employment are in jeopardy. Through EdVISTA CARES evaluation analysis, teachers will have the tools to connect emotionally with all students and provide them with the understanding and skills necessary for entry into an ever-changing world. After student evaluation and teacher engagement in the EdVISTA CARES workshops, teachers will have the ability to maximize their student’s diverse talents in the learning process and establish a scaffold, building block-like-learning process, which is a

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vital mandate for educational and lifelong success. This project centers on student efficacy within a learning community where students make unique contributions and learn the critical reasoning skills that are necessary to rise above poverty and disadvantage.

### Project Overview: Summary

Within the project guidelines we evaluate all students, identify exceptionalities, and empower teachers to become student-aware in order to understand learner readiness, address academic challenges, and design instruction that personalizes and makes learning relevant. Instruction can then provide rich opportunities for students to create complex meaning and connection, rather than simply recall discrete, disconnected information on demand. Project-based learning will provide students with practical applications of core knowledge across disciplines that will develop the tools for students to become independent learners who succeed beyond school. As a result of our breakthrough process, vulnerable students will receive necessary interventions. Within three years, standardized test scores will improve by 20 percent, graduation rates will increase by 30 percent, and college matriculation will grow by 20 percent. Students will be re-assessed tri-annually, and teacher training will be ongoing during the project period and beyond.

The project is designed to change the culture of schooling in the rural southeast. To that end, EdVISTA CARES has initially selected counties in South Carolina that are known to be in dire need. From this selection we will collectively choose a combination of school districts, as our Southeast prototype to which we will agree to provide free-of-charge 3 years of EdVISTA CARES services, with a beginning target of 5,000 students. We will provide the teacher and staff training to test all students and design and implement curriculum that addresses the needs of students. The culture of school will become one where teachers are part of a collaborative learning community and where all students feel valued, nurtured, and mentored to fulfill their potential. A focus on essential

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understandings, on which students will build each year of their schooling, will engage them in relevant subject matter and provide the opportunities to develop the skills to compete in a global marketplace. Furthermore, we will engage the home communities of the students.

**Student evaluation:** EdVISTA CARES will employ and train key local personnel to assess students' cognitive abilities and achievement levels during the first weeks of school to determine capacity levels and readiness in basic skills areas. Teachers will supplement this assessment with informal questionnaires to identify learning styles and special affinities. This information will be utilized in developing lesson plans and in differentiating instruction for each student. Students will be re-assessed every three years, and all incoming students will be evaluated throughout the project's three-year duration. Thereafter, we expect the overwhelming results of the new school culture to be so compelling that the schools will continue to follow the EdVISTA CARES system and maintain the established professional alliance; this alliance will accommodate the continued availability and purchase of assessment kits, evaluation services, and access to attend our yearly EdVISTA CARES workshops, seminars, and exciting conferences.

**Professional development:** EdVISTA CARES will hold a summer conference before the first contract school-year and during the two subsequent summers and provide trained facilitators to support teachers and staff throughout the project. Teachers will learn to collaborate in the development of a learner-centered, meaningful, project-based curriculum by sharing and planning instruction.

### **Project Objectives:** Key Factors of Achievement Necessary for Success

The project seeks to change the outcomes for disadvantaged children through their educational experience. Our level of success will be measured by the fulfillment of the following objectives:

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Within three years,

- 1) standardized test scores will improve by 20 percent
- 2) graduation rates will increase by 30 percent
- 3) college matriculation will grow by 20 percent
- 4) sustained, long-term professional development will maintain high levels of achievement beyond the intensely funded term of the project
- 5) the communities will be engaged in student learning

### Project Outcomes and Objective Reporting:

1) Trained local EdVISTA CARES personnel will administer the following array of assessments to students during the first weeks of school of the first year of the project, and in every 3-year cycle.

- verbal reasoning test
- nonverbal reasoning test
- processing/attention test
- reading comprehension test
- math calculation test
- written expression test
- reading fluency test
- math fluency test
- writing fluency test

Objectives 1 and 2) Education Report Cards are issued annually by every state. This is mandated by the federal “No Child Left Behind Act”. These report cards are called Adequate Yearly Progress State Report Card (AYP). These report cards can be accessed by district and by school. The standardized test scores (to satisfy objective 1) are the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT). To satisfy objective 2, the on-time

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graduation rate is included. To see the actual published “report card” visit:

<http://www.ed.sc.gov/topics/researchandstats/schoolreportcard/2008/default.cfm>

Or

<http://www.ed.sc.gov/agency/Accountability/Data-Management-and-Analysis/SchoolReportCardsByYear.html>

Objective 3, college matriculation, will be tracked by the annual College Freshman Report provided by the South Carolina Department of Education. This report shows all high school completers, by high school, and statistically follows them during their first year out of high school. The number of students from each high school that matriculate to college is given as well as other pertinent data. Please see:

<http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Accountability/Data-Management-and-Analysis/old/research/CollegeFreshmanReport.html> to view the actual report.

Objective 4 will be tracked by our well-documented continuing relationship with every school district in the project. Two methods of sustaining the long-term professional development are:

- EdVISTA CARES will provide its assessment and evaluation materials and services to the chosen school districts through the three years of the project. A continuum of assessment and evaluation services beyond the project period will be provided at an affordable, cost-efficient-per-student non-profit cost.
- EdVISTA CARES will provide access to on-going professional development summer programs for all teachers who have served in an EdVISTA CARES program on a long-term basis.

Objective 5 will be met by the development of academic leagues similar to sports leagues through which groups of students compete within specified subject areas. The students

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will have the opportunity to join or be formed into teams that will compete and learn by performing. These academic leagues will involve the students, teachers, parents, and the greater community. By creating an engaging long-term team goal with many intermediate steps of success and recognition, the participating students will be taking the first steps in the self-mastery of the subject matter. More importantly, the students will begin to internalize the method required to master a subject and engage in the process of subject mastery independently. The creation, recognition, media attention, parent celebrated discovery, and monitoring by the individual schools of the academic leagues will act as a gauge of the success of this portion of our project.

### **Project Goals: Impact to be Achieved**

EdVISTA CARES South Carolina Initiative will meet the needs of these children and the future of the community by evaluating every student to determine cognitive and achievement levels, a critical step to appropriate instruction. Transforming teaching practices to differentiate instruction based on the knowledge of each child is the first step and involves a change in the culture of the school. Teachers need, and will be empowered, to meet the demands of today's students and enjoy the rewards of excellence in their craft. EdVISTA CARES will provide professional development programs that will prepare teachers to utilize content in the service of learning and to collaborate with each other in developing instructional plans that will engage *all* students, especially vulnerable learners who tune out or drop out of school because they lack meaningful learning experiences and specific, relevant goals. **Students will learn *how* to learn through the development of year-long projects that provide experience *doing a subject or discipline* rather than *learning about a subject* and recalling isolated facts or information.** Students' strengths will be utilized in the service of weaker areas. In the process, students will find the joy in learning.

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*Differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences, and understanding by design* are buzz words in education circles, but what do these terms mean to the school teacher in a rural area faced with a classroom of 20-35 students in the daily work of covering an overfull curriculum and a mandate to teach to standardized tests and unwieldy benchmarks of what students should know and be able to do? What do these catchy phrases mean to the vulnerable students who are under-challenged, over-challenged, or just uninterested?

It is often said that some students will be successful in life despite their education. While this may be true for a few, a great majority of disadvantaged and vulnerable students will lose ground every year they spend in a classroom. Their needs will go unmet, and their future will be limited by the education they receive at the hands of well-intentioned, but woefully inadequate professionals. Most public schools focus almost exclusively on content over meaningful learning. Accumulating unconnected, unprioritized elements of knowledge and skills is insufficient for understanding and application in the digital age. Moreover, without an awareness of each student's needs, capabilities, and interests, teachers have great difficulty developing student efficacy. Many students often find no place for their talents within the classroom. Learning disabilities plague many; children from different home-cultures often do not "get" school; exceptional individuals are often bored and unchallenged. Therefore, a generation of vulnerable, unengaged students is being left behind (e.g., in some Lowcountry counties, only 35% of elementary male students graduate high school). Their prospects for meaningful, gainful employment are in severe jeopardy. Existence on the margins of society or within a life of crime is almost certain. Making an emotional connection with these children and providing them with the tools necessary for entry into an ever-changing world are vital mandates for every teacher. All students should have the means to use their diverse innate talents and skills to own their learning and be valuable members of a learning team in school.

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To make these goals a reality, we will provide a differentiated classroom experience for each learner so that he or she can move as far and as fast as possible along a learning continuum. Research clearly shows that only when a student sets individual goals and works at a level of difficulty that is both challenging and attainable for that student does learning take place. Teachers within our project will learn how to modify elements of the classroom environment to those that celebrate each student's learning style, intelligence preference, culture, gender, and natural affinities through altering instruction to the profile of the student and scaffolding worthy assignments so each student can taste success. In this environment, learners will develop the sustained curiosity and interest that are vital to their growth. These elements of modification, mentioned above, include the following: areas of content based on student readiness; content and product based on student interest; and learning environment, process, and product based on student profile and affect. In this model, curriculum and instruction are in the service of learning; that is, curriculum is important, focused, engaging, demanding, and scaffolded so that all learners can achieve levels of mastery. Differentiated activities will have a particular rationale in which the teacher understands the theoretical underpinnings of differentiation and modifies activities in ways that bridge gaps for students based on their learning profile. Only in this way can students make the significant achievement in understanding, tests scores, graduation rates, and college matriculation outlined above.

Teachers' natural passion and responsiveness to student needs are critical to the project's goals. Therefore, the goals of the project extend to the development of teachers' understandings and attitudes about themselves as teachers, their students, and the learning community. For vulnerable students to succeed, teachers need to convey the following message: *I have important activities for you to do today. These activities are worthwhile tasks. While some of them may be difficult, you can do them. They are essential for your growth and development as a citizen within this classroom and within the larger community. You have a specific role to play that makes us all more efficient and effective*

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*in this community we call school. It is my job to help you succeed. We are partners in your personal growth.* With this kind of attitude and the tools to differentiate instruction, teachers become empowered professionals who continue to learn their craft, collaborate with their peers, and take pride in their role in shaping the lives of future generations. The project will thus become self-sustaining in its fourth year. Furthermore, through this project's model of success we will offer our non-profit services to an ever-expanding number of school districts throughout the Southeast and across the country at a cost of less than 5% of the total per student district budget.