## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. INITIATING
   - Statement of the problem
   - Project scope

3. PLANNING AND ORGANIZING
   - Project goals
   - Human resource management plan
   - Schedule
     - Milestone needed to accomplish
     - Timeline to reach each milestone
   - Quality management plan
   - Risk management plan
   - Proposed project budget

4. EXECUTION

5. MONITORING AND CONTROLLING
   - Monitoring
   - Controlling

6. CLOSING THE PROJECT
   - Evaluation of key metrics
   - Lessons learned
   - Recommendations for future projects

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

8. APPENDIX
I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Problem
68% of teens want to own a business someday, but the current education system does not equip them with the knowledge or skills in order to do so, as only 27% of middle schools nationwide offer a business class. In our own school district, we noticed a similar trend; although the high school does have a business program, there are very limited business education opportunities at the middle school level. Our district’s middle schools offer no business courses and there are little to no opportunities for students to learn about or practice entrepreneurship.

What is Ignite?
We launched Ignite to resolve this issue and to promote the development of business skills applicable to any career. Ignite was a brand-new month-long program centered around educating the youth in our community about foundational business and entrepreneurship concepts. Ignite also emphasized critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving through project-based learning and real-world application.

MISSION STATEMENT
To ignite students’ creativity and provide them with an opportunity to develop and apply their entrepreneurial mindset

TARGET AUDIENCE
Students at Creekside Middle School and Clay Middle School within the Carmel Clay Schools district

Goals
1. Expose students to business knowledge
2. Help students develop a solution to a relevant problem in their community
3. Equip students to effectively communicate their ideas
4. Teach students the principles of professionalism

Weekly Session Schedule

IDEATE
Week 1: Oct 4-9
- Intro to business & problem solving
- Formation & collaboration of teams
- Guest speakers shared stories about entrepreneurship

INNOVATE
Week 2: Oct 11-16
- Intro to marketing & budgeting/finance
- Research of problem & solution
- Organizing of ideas through creation of presentation aids

ELEVATE
Week 3: Oct 18-23
- Intro to professionalism
- Crafting of business pitches
- Feedback from peers & high school mentor team

Ignite Sessions
To foster learning and introduce students to the entrepreneurial mindset, we organized and led educational sessions at the two middle schools in our school district. Each session took place directly after school and a total of six sessions were held at each school. During these sessions, we carried out interactive workshops, games, simulations, and other activities that covered topics such as entrepreneurship, marketing, budgeting, resource management, problem solving, and
professionalism. At these sessions, students not only learned essential business knowledge, but they also got to apply their skills through working on a community-oriented proposal. Students formed into teams and were challenged to identify a problem in their community and develop a unique and effective solution. During each Ignite session, we gave students time to collaborate on their projects. The middle schoolers’ projects consisted of a business-style pitch as well as supporting presentation materials such as slideshows, posters, videos, and prototypes.

The Ignite Competition
A major component of Ignite was the competition held at the end of the month. We designed the Ignite competition as a way for the participants to put into practice the business skills and principles of professionalism that they had learned during the sessions. All of the middle school students finally got to share their proposals in front of a panel of judges consisting of local business owners, school administrators, and city officials. The competitors were given ten minutes to pitch their idea and answer questions from the judges. The top two performers from each section advanced to the final round. An awards ceremony was then held to highlight all of the students’ hard work and to announce the winning groups.

Fundraising
To make Ignite accessible to all students, we raised money through sponsorships. We partnered with several local businesses to raise a total of $1450, helping us to cover all expenses and further the impact of the program. Ignite sponsors had their logos featured in the competition program, which was handed out to 200+ students and parents. The size of their displayed logos differed based on the sponsorship level they chose. We had a total of seven sponsors:

Impact

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clay MS Students</th>
<th>Creekside MS Students</th>
<th>High School Students</th>
<th>Local Businesses</th>
<th>Entrepreneurs and City Officials</th>
<th>Guest Speakers</th>
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Ignite mobilized the next generation of leaders through providing the youth in our community with an opportunity to develop and apply their entrepreneurial mindset. We impacted nearly 100 people directly as well as 2100 indirectly, both within the middle schools and within our DECA chapter. We engaged with 59 students from our target population and taught them business skills that will benefit them no matter what career path they pursue. 16 high school students with different backgrounds, interests, and talents helped support our goal by serving on the promotions team, mentor team, and competition team, where they were able to grow their leadership skills. We effectively connected with 22 business professionals and entrepreneurs who helped Ignite succeed by serving as guest speakers during the sessions, judging at the competition, and financially supporting the project. However, the numbers only share half of the story, and Ignite went beyond simply educating its participants. Many students entered the program unsure of their abilities, but by the end, they had transformed into confident, capable leaders. Ignite empowered students to reach their highest potential and we are excited to continue its mission in the future.
II. INITIATING
A. Statement of the problem
Entrepreneurs and businesspeople drive innovation and change in our society. They provide us with products and services that enhance our quality of life, and create jobs that allow our economy to thrive. Driven by rapid advances in technology, today’s business landscape calls for all people to be entrepreneurial.

The modern entrepreneur is someone who “sees an opportunity to create value and is willing to take a risk to capitalize on that opportunity.”¹ When understood in this light, entrepreneurship is much more than an occupation; it is a mindset that can be adopted by anyone in any occupation. In fact, this mindset is becoming increasingly important, especially at a young age. Many of today’s business leaders began enterprising or innovating at a young age, and have used the skills acquired from these experiences to shape their future business ventures.²

However, there is a clear disparity between how successful businesspeople have acquired their essential skill set early in life and the current educational system. Only 27% of middle schools nationwide offer at least one business class.³ When analyzing our own school district, we noticed a similar trend; while the high school does have a business program, our district’s middle schools do not, and offer almost no opportunities for students to learn about or practice entrepreneurship. To directly combat this problem, we created the Ignite Project.

B. Project scope
We launched the Ignite Project to provide the youth in our community with an opportunity to develop and apply their entrepreneurial mindset. In doing so, we hope to not only inspire future entrepreneurs, but also help students build the skills necessary for any successful career.

THE IGNITE MISSION:
To ignite students’ creativity and provide them with an opportunity to develop and apply their entrepreneurial mindset

Due to the notable lack of entrepreneurship opportunities at the middle school level, we chose to focus our efforts on students ranging from sixth grade to eighth grade. Ignite exposed these students to foundational business concepts, as well as the basics of professionalism.

We worked directly with Ignite participants to build their entrepreneurship knowledge through games, simulations, and activities. Additionally, we empowered students to collaborate on a project that involved identifying a problem or shortcoming in their community (school, neighborhood, city, and beyond) and proposing a unique solution. Students used their newly acquired business knowledge to prepare their proposals for the Ignite Competition at the end of the month-long preparation period. In the two rounds of competition, students presented their projects in front of judging panels consisting of school administrators, local business owners,