

**U.S. Department of Education - EDCAPS
G5-Technical Review Form (New)**

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/23/2016 09:44 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	35
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	42
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	0
Total	100	77

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The magnitude or severity of the problem to be addressed by the proposed project.

(2) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

Strengths:

(1) The magnitude or severity of the problem to be addressed by the proposed project.

The applicant does a good job correlating research on the impact of race and poverty with students' academic achievement (p.2) and national population shifts for Whites and minority groups with similar shifts within the district (p. 1). Eleven of the 14 project schools have free and reduced lunch populations exceeding 50 percent while half have F/R lunch populations at 60% or higher (appendix C, pages 2, 3). Five of the 14 project schools show a White population of 50 percent or more.

(2) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies.

CCS' project is built upon research that shows magnet schools to be effective in attracting a diverse populations and increasing socioeconomic integration (p. 4). The applicant began its magnet school implementation in 2007, with added school in 2011 and the creation of a K-12 STEM pipeline in 2012 (p.4). Such gradual progression has included increased demand and allowed the district to examine results in some critical areas. For example, a 2014 International Baccalaureate (IB) magnet program showed promising results within one year by decreasing the free and reduced lunch percentage from 65 percent to 59%. Its 2013 Spanish dual immersion program at a high-need elementary school also showed promising results on academic achievement (p. 4). The district also credits its magnet program with increasing its graduation, showing 72.9% of students graduated in 2007-2008 growing to 90% graduating in 2014-2015 (p.5).

(3) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

The applicant's proposal clearly addresses increasing diversity with a range of magnet school options (p. 6) and providing a non-cognitive curriculum to promote social and emotional development (p. 13). The district's waiver of attendance zones should also impact students' ability to attend the school of their choice when a school is outside of their neighborhoods. The project focuses not only on race but also language, with five dual language immersion programs at schools with more than 25% ELL Hispanic populations. Attention to language needs would impact relationships and increase understanding among students.

Weaknesses:

(1) The magnitude or severity of the problem to be addressed by the proposed project.

No weaknesses noted.

(2) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies.

No weaknesses noted.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 35

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.

(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

(3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

(4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths:

(1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.

The applicant includes very clear goals, objectives and outcomes which can be measured (p. 15, 16). Drawing on lessons learned from its existing magnet schools, goals and objectives are set for four critical areas essential to the success of the project: district policy revisions to promote magnet school expansion, professional development on rigor and cultural; providing students with socio-economic, academic and non-cognitive supports and early engagement of families.

(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

The management plan includes a thorough year-by-year listing of activities with assigned responsibilities. The narrative provides details on the role of key staff, including an advisory council charged with aligning community and district resources to ensure the project is appropriately supported as needed (pp.16-21).

(3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

There are two key methods the applicant would utilize to ensure feedback and improving. One is the use of an advisory council (p. 20), which would meet quarterly to review progress against the project's Logic Model and its use of the Plan-Do-Check-Act approach, which would examine both existing practices and as well as recommend new strategies(p. 21). There are also weekly meetings of the management team, which includes a project director and two project advisors and weekly meetings at the school level (p. 20).

(4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Based on prior years of implementation, the applicant has a well-designed plan to disseminate information on the project. Its School Choice Institute (p. 21) would allow attendees an opportunity for in-person inquiries concerning their own implementation or replication plans. The provision of a written sustainability plan would aid the institutionalization of lessons learned as well as provide valuable guidance for other districts (p. 22). That the applicant has been pro-active in sharing information and garnering support is evident in the number of commitments for support from partner organizations (p. 22, Appendix G).

Weaknesses:

(1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.

There is a heavy reliance on review of attendance and administrative records (pp. 15, 16), which may not reveal the kind of information that leads to full understanding of the results or issues. For example, looking at attendance records for magnet school teachers who complete professional training on rigor and cultural responsiveness (p. 15) will not reveal the teachers understanding or their ability to transfer knowledge learned into practice in the classroom.

(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

There is no reference to the role of the school administrators in implementing new programs or disseminating project information relevant to the schools which they manage. For example, the launch of dual immersion or new neighborhood STEM schools does not show school administrators with any responsibilities. Additionally it shows a timeframe for activities to be completed but no timeframe at which the activities would begin (pp. 17-19).

(3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

No weaknesses noted.

(4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 42

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

N/A - Scored by another reviewer.

Weaknesses:

N/A - Scored by another reviewer.

Reader's Score: 0

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	33
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	41
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	0
Total	100	74

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The magnitude or severity of the problem to be addressed by the proposed project.

(2) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

Strengths:

(1)The applicant clearly described and documented the need for the magnet school project to address academic achievement while decreasing racial, ethnic and socioeconomic isolation of students attending their lowest performing schools. Narrative descriptions characterized the school district as fast growing with 80 languages spoken at home within the district and increasing numbers of low -socioeconomic Hispanic and African-American students who historically have lagged behind their Asian and White peers in academic achievement. The applicant provided relevant descriptive statistics on the national level as documentation of these gaps in achievement by race (p. 1-2). Local descriptive statistics appropriately documented lower graduation rates for minority students other than Asians in the district's schools as compared to their White counterparts (p. 5).

(2) The proposed project appropriately builds on the district's prior efforts by expanding their current magnet school program based on the theory that magnet schools will increase socioeconomic and racial integration and impact student achievement. The magnet schools are appropriately centered on STEM schools, a Spanish dual-immersion magnet program at high poverty schools, and an International Baccalaureate magnet program. The applicant appropriately intends to expand their current magnet school program to include all district schools with a greater than 50% reduced or free lunch rate and schools with a greater than 25% ELL Hispanic population (p. 6).The applicant provided an appropriate rationale for the project by providing documentation of the district's increased graduation rates and decreases in subgroup graduate rate gaps since implementing the magnet school program (p. 5). In addition, the applicant cited relevant research demonstrating that magnet schools are effective in increasing socioeconomic integration by attracting diverse groups (p .4) and that more balanced racial and socioeconomic student populations lead to increased academic achievement (p. 5). The applicant provided district achievement performance data for reading, mathematics and science that demonstrated the impact of the magnet school program, particularly for subgroups of various socioeconomic status and races that support the applicant's claim that their results are consistent with research demonstrating a more balanced student population leads to increases in academic achievement (p. 5; Appendix C, p. 3-5). The applicant has appropriate plans to revise district attendance boundary polices, provide transportation, and allow greater student access to Advance Placement courses and STEM programs in which minorities are underrepresented (p. 6-7). There are extensive plans to prepare teachers by providing relevant professional development, including culturally responsive teaching delivered by an outside expert in diversity and equity issues (p. 8); establishing School Equity Teams using a train the trainers model (p. 9); contracting with outside providers for STEM education professional development in three delivery formats (p. 11); offering teachers in the dual language immersion programs outside assistance in integrating project-based inquiry and global themes into instruction (p. 11-2); developing an online course for teachers on problem-based learning; and a summer institute. Appropriate support systems for students are planned, including a non-cognitive curriculum, Second Step, for socio-emotional development and reductions in behavior issues; Family Outreach Committees at each school; a

Family Outreach Liaison for home visits; annual open houses and school choice fairs; community surveys; community forums; translators at public events; and transportation provisions (p 13-15).

(3). The applicant appropriately addressed Absolute Priority 1, Promoting Diversity, by establishing K-12 magnet programs in high needs areas and changing district attendance policies to facilitate recruitment of a racially and socioeconomically diverse student population at each school (p. 5). The program addresses the Invitational priority to increase academic achievement and educational attainment outcomes while decreasing the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic isolation of students attending the lowest performing schools in the district. (p. 5).

Weaknesses:

- (1) No weaknesses were noted.
- (2) Some interventions were not clearly described or were vague, such as the progressive modules, the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and global competencies (p. 12); and the content of the summer learning institute was not well described (p. 12). No cause-effect experimental evaluation data were provided to support the claim that MTSS has decreased disciplinary issues and boosted academic achievement in the district (p. 12) although disciplinary suspensions have dropped over the past years (Appendix C, p 6).
- (3) No weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: 33

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.**
- (2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**
- (3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.**
- (4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.**

Strengths:

- (1) The applicant appropriately identified four relevant and measurable project goals, such as revising policies to promote magnet schools, and identified specific corresponding measures for assessing outcomes for those four goals, such as collecting attendance and enrollment figures (p. 15-16). The logic model clearly specified relevant inputs, such as personnel, partners and resources; strategies or activities to meet those goals, such as conducting an annual School Choice Institute; corresponding outputs, such as new magnet schools; and measurable outcomes, such as increased diversity and enrollment in magnet schools, and long-term impact of becoming a national model for school choice (Appendix D, p. 1).
- (2) The management plan appropriately provides for a full time Project Director for overall leadership and oversight and two part time Project Advisors that should assist in completing the project on time and within budget (Budget Narrative, p. e48). The project is guided by a management timeline that specifies relevant milestones and activities, designates specific personnel responsible for accomplishing those activities, and the timeframe for completion, such as the Independent Evaluator providing quarterly reports to the Advisory Council beginning in the first quarter of the project

by April , 2017 (p. 17-19).

(3) Continuous monitoring and feedback for improvement is provided for by several mechanisms. The Advisory Council will meet quarterly to review project implementation and study evaluation updates and make any corrective adjustments (p. 20, 22). Weekly management team meetings will be held, teachers and administrators will meet weekly as part of their professional learning communities, and school equity teams will develop annual professional learning plans (p. 20). Evaluation results will be disseminated to key stakeholders quarterly (p. 18-19).

(4) The applicant has appropriate plans to disseminate the project through regional and national conference presentations and by holding an annual School Choice Institute to share the successes, challenges and lessons learned from the project with other districts wanting to implement similar programs (p. 21-22). The applicant has identified appropriate project partners of a foundation, a charitable trust, and educational providers for sustainability and program match (p. 22).

Weaknesses:

(1)The measure of achievement in reading, The Discovery Education Reading scores, with anticipated increases of 2 points each year is a non-standardized measure tied to specific reading worksheets and an instructional support program that lacks reliability and validity. It is unclear why the applicant would not use standardized test scores to measure student achievement (p. 14-15).

(2) The management plan timeline did not provide for the actual conduct of the formative and summative evaluation through the years with corresponding data collection points. The number of Student Empowerment Counselors was not specified (p. 17; Budget) and it is unclear if their salaries will be adequate to support their roles (Budget Narrative, p. e48). It is unclear why the Project Director is not involved in launching the project administration and oversight processes and procedures at the beginning of the project (p. 17). The Project Director has few role responsibilities for a position that should allow for overall oversight and leadership of the project. The members of the Advisory Council who will review project implementation and evaluation reports were not identified; the composition of this committee is unclear (p. 20). It is unclear if the Student Empowerment Counselors will be existing staff or be hired and no job description is provided for this role.

(3) It is unclear how the logic model contains a continuous feedback loop as the applicant states (p. 20; Appendix D).

(4) No weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: 41

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

N/A- Scored by another reviewer

Weaknesses:

N/A - scored by another reviewer

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/14/2016 05:12 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/20/2016 12:29 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	0
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	14
Total	100	14

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The magnitude or severity of the problem to be addressed by the proposed project.
- (2) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies.
- (3) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

Strengths:

N/A- Scored by another reviewer.

Weaknesses:

N/A- Scored by another reviewer.

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.
- (2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.
- (3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.
- (4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths:

N/A- Scored by another reviewer.

Weaknesses:

N/A- Scored by another reviewer.

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

The four research questions to be addressed by this project are clearly and concisely articulated (p22-23). The applicant proposes to conduct a longitudinal quasi-experimental design, which has potential to provide important and valuable information about the efficacy of their program for improving second grade reading achievement and eighth grade math achievement.

The research and evaluation team appears to have a wealth of directly relevant experience and expertise for this project (p25).

Weaknesses:

The discussion surrounding the research questions would have been strengthened with a description of the hypotheses or expected outcomes each of the questions was intended to address (p22-23). As such, these research questions are written to sound as if they are more descriptive or even exploratory in nature.

The proposal would have been strengthened with a greater alignment between the goals and objectives (p15-16), logic model (Appendix D) and the research questions and expected outcomes. As it stands now, the evaluation plan is disjointed or disconnected from the overall project.

Given the challenges in establishing new magnet schools and new programs within schools, the evaluation proposal would be stronger with an explanation of strategies that will be put into place to address student attrition— especially given that this is a longitudinal study, which requires following the same students from one year to the next.

The applicant proposes to use a quasi-experimental design, which requires a matched sample group for baseline equivalence. The precise procedures to be used for matching program participants to nonparticipants and for verifying baseline equivalence is unclear (p23). In order to meet the What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards, a study has to have reliable and valid outcome data used to measure the impact of the treatment and no known confounding factors. It is unclear how the outcome data in the present research study addresses issues of reliability, validity, and confounds.

On the whole, the application would have been strengthened with more details regarding the precise nature of the qualitative outcome measures and how they will be collected and analyzed. This includes the description of the Fidelity Implementation Index (p24-25), which would have been strengthened with a few examples from prior work or greater

detail about the source and kind of data and the procedures for analysis and ensuring reliability.

It is hard to determine if sufficient resources have been assigned to the research and evaluation tasks as it is unclear precisely which personnel will be conducting which tasks at what level of effort.

Reader's Score: 14

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Reader #4: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	0
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	15
Total	100	15

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #4: *****

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The magnitude or severity of the problem to be addressed by the proposed project.
- (2) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies.
- (3) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

Strengths:

N/A - Scored by another reviewer

Weaknesses:

N/A - Scored by another reviewer

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- (1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.
- (2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.
- (3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.
- (4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

The evaluation proposes a quasi-experimental design with matched comparison groups (p.22). The evaluation includes more than one unit of analysis which will reduce the influence of confounding factors (p.24). Baseline demographics and previous achievement examined for the match group comparison (p.23). Propensity score matching is also proposed to minimize bias in the sample (p.23). A standardized state assessment is proposed for one of the outcome measures (p. 23). The aforementioned design components are aligned with What Works Clearinghouse standards with reservations. The evaluation questions are clear and important (pp. 22-23). There is a plan to assess the need for HLM and the proposed analysis model includes covariates that will parse out variance attributed to external factors (p.24). Two lead evaluators are identified (Appendix F). After a review of the curricula vitae, the two lead evaluators seem qualified (experienced and trained) to carry out the proposed evaluation. The proposed budget amount seems sufficient to carry out the evaluation (Appendix – Budget Narrative).

Weaknesses:

While much of the criteria for What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards with reservations are addressed in this proposal, a discussion of attrition is missing. A low attrition rate or an acceptable plan for high attrition is required to meet WWC standards with reservations. Some discussion of attrition would strengthen the proposal. Qualitative data collection is proposed, but there is insufficient information provided concerning this method (p.24). The type of qualitative data to be collected (e.g., observation, focus group, semi-structured interview) is not reported. The sampling and analysis plan for the qualitative is also not reported. As a result, the appropriateness of this method cannot be assessed. For the evaluation team, the size of the team is not reported. Only the two lead evaluators are discussed (Appendix F). Two evaluators does not seem sufficient to conduct this evaluation. The size of the remaining team and general qualifications for the remaining team members was not provided. Percentage of effort for each team member is also not reported. Without these details, it is not clear that there are sufficient resources to carry out the evaluation.

Reader's Score: 15

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Reader #5: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	35
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	42
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	0
Total	100	77

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #5: *****

Applicant: Cabarrus County Schools (U411C160019)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The magnitude or severity of the problem to be addressed by the proposed project.

(2) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

Strengths:

1. The applicant clearly describes the severe problems associated with segregating students racially and socioeconomically. In fact “poverty and student racial composition disparities have been confirmed to be the strongest correlates of academic achievement gaps and educational attainment” p. 2. Moreover, the applicant states that when a school’s free and reduced lunch rate exceeds 50% it becomes difficult to retain middle-class families; when the rate reaches 75%, academic achievement is negatively impacted for all students, p. 2. The lowest performing elementary schools in the applicant’s district (Cabarrus County) have a minority enrollment reaching 60% and a free and reduced lunch rate reaching 61% compared to rates of 44% and 47% overall for the district. Moreover, the applicant describes the benefits to ALL student of attending school in an integrated setting—increased cultural awareness, social capital, cross cultural competencies, etc., p. 3.

2. The applicant describes their great success with magnet schools (STEM, Performance, Language Immersion, International Baccalaureate, Career Academies and Early College) to balance the rates of socioeconomic and racial populations in each school. In addition, the magnet schools contributed to graduation rates rising significantly in the district from 2007-08 to 2014-15, p. 5. The district currently has many children on the waiting list for these magnet programs, p. 4. The applicant proposes to build on their existing magnet school strategy by establishing additional magnet programs in the high need areas, paired with other interventions that are promising such as social-emotional and other academic supports and services which is a promising strategy to diversify the Cabarrus County schools.

3. The applicant’s proposal to establish magnet programs in their highest need (schools with a free and reduced lunch rate of greater than 50% and/or schools with a greater than 25% ELL Hispanic population) while also layering in “innovative non-cognitive, socio-emotional, and academic supports and services”, directly addresses Absolute Priority 1: Promoting Diversity.

The Applicant’s plan include many features that will help balance school populations: hub transportation plans, p. 7, automatically enrolling neighborhood children in the new magnet programs, p. 8, eliminating current participation requirements, p. 8, and fees for AP and IB exams will be covered for low-income students, p. 8. The applicant will also provide professional development to teachers on Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices and STEM, p. 9 & 11, establish School Equity Teams and implement Problem-Based learning, p. 10, implement dual immersion schools and provide Summer Professional Learning Institutes to equip their teachers to support under-resourced students to close the achievement gap. Another program that will be part of the plan to promote diversity in Cabarrus County Schools will be the expansion of the use of Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to address students non-cognitive needs, p. 12. The district also has a comprehensive plan to engage families in their child’s education, p. 13 & 14.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 35

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan**1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

(1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.

(2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

(3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

(4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.

Strengths:

1. The applicant has 4 goals (p. 6, 8, 12 & 13) with clearly specified and measurable outcomes for each goal. For example, goal #1 is to "revise policies to promote magnet school expansion and pipeline persistence", p. 6. The applicant then clearly describes the measure to meet this goal: "1) intentionally place magnet programs in all schools with a greater than 50% free and reduced price lunch rate; and 2) implement dual language immersion magnet programs in any school with a greater than 25% ELL Hispanic population", p. 6. The applicant provides narrative about the way in which this will be accomplished.

2. The applicant has a Senior Project Advisor and Project Advisor in place. A Project Director as well as Student Empowerment Counselors will be hired. The applicant has a clear plan to manage the grant and has a detailed timeline for implementation of project activities.

3. The applicant has a clear continuous improvement plan that outlines who will meet (Advisory Council), how often (quarterly) and the information that will be reviewed. The management team will meet weekly. The external evaluation team will also be involved in the continuous review process. The logic model "ensures that both continuous quality improvements and program enhancements are guided by evaluation.", p. 20. The Cabarrus County Schools will use the Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle to guide their continuous improvement. This Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle will provide a framework for continuous improvement to ensure that all steps are taken and the improvements are made on a consistent basis.

4. The Cabarrus County Schools will conduct an annual School Choice Institute to share "successes, challenges and lessons learned by teachers and school and district administrators with attendance open to other districts across the nation wanting to implement similar programs." p. 21. This will provide new and expanded opportunities for other schools and districts to learn about using magnet schools to diversify schools. The Project director and staff will also present at regional and national conferences.

Weaknesses:

1. The application would be strengthened by using state exam scores to measure reading improvement rather than only the Discovery Education reading program.

2. It is unclear the way that school administration (principals, counselors, etc.) will be involved in the management of the project.

3. The plan for continuous improvement would be strengthened by quarterly meetings of the Advisory Council and school administrators.

Reader's Score: 42

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

This section was scored by another reviewer.

Weaknesses:

This section was scored by another reviewer.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

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