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

Technical Review

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) (U411C170020)
Reader #1:   **********

	Points Possible	**Points Scored**
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	30	30
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Management	50	50
Sub Total	80	80
Total	80	80

Technical Review Form

Reader #1:   **********

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) (U411C170020)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

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

   (1) The national significance of 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 represents an exceptional approach to the priority or priorities established for the competition.

   Strengths:

   Pages e20 and e21 effectively identify disabled, minority, gender nonconforming, and low SES students as high-risk across the nation. Data from the Department of Civil Rights are cited to support this assertion. Additional studies to this detail specific problems in thee populations
   are also cited.

   The proposed project builds upon current research on peer mentoring by examining the effects of this strategy among a middle school population, intensive training on middle school mentors, and review of data by a Stakeholder Team to allow feedback and improve the program (Page e30). The addition of these strategies, particularly, the extensive training of middle school peer mentors through a credit based course, will likely improve the knowledge available on the subject.

   The present project does represent exceptional approaches to priorities established in this competition. Specifically, Priority One is addressed by focusing an intensive peer mentoring program. According to the narrative, the studies on this strategy are limited at best and there is no known large-scale study on the effects of peer mentoring in middle school (Page e31). As also included in the narrative, the successful implementation of such a strategy has been designed to improve Social and Emotional functioning of the students mentored. This and the benefits to the mentors have been shown beneficial to school climate (Priority Two) (Pages e31 and e32).

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 30

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 extent to which performance feedback and continuous improvement are integral to the design 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:

Pages e35 to e36 has Table of Goals, Objectives, Outcomes and Measures. Outcomes are divided into Short and Long term in a Logic Model on Page e36. These clearly relate to the project as described, measure both the academic and social/emotional changes in mentored students, and where possible use previously developed measures.

A timeline of key activities both in implementation and evaluation of the project is provided on Pages e42 and e43. Individuals responsible for implementing each portion of the timeline are indicated, the structure of the management team is described, and a description of each position are additionally given (Page e41). The individuals who have designed this program have given forethought to its organization, structure, timeline, and responsibilities.

Page e37 describes a detailed method of ensuring fidelity of implementation as well as program design. These two types of feedback will help ensure that the desired program activities continue and do not drift in implementation and that program initiatives that are not as effective can be changed as feedback is provided.

The need to dissemination program is discussed. Specific actions of dissemination include identification of journals which to which evaluations will be submitted, conferences at which presentations will be made, webinars and host information sessions, website information and a newsletter sent to a particularly wide audience. The effect will be widespread and will reflect the research findings.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: **50**

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 07/12/2017 10:42 AM

Technical Review

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) (U411C170020)
Reader #2: **********

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	30	30
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Management	50	50
Sub Total	80	80
Total	80	80

Technical Review Form

Reader #2:   **********

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) (U411C170020)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

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

   (1) The national significance of 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 represents an exceptional approach to the priority or priorities established for the competition.

   Strengths:

   The applicant provides a strong introduction that describes the overall plan for the proposed project. On pages 2-3, the applicant gives national data on the scope of school suspension problem and establishes a connection between that, the proposed project and school climate. The proposed project is unique in that it will serve both urban and rural high need students. The proposed project will be based in Social Emotional Learning theory and will build on the existing Peer Group Connect-High School Program and the applicant provides data on the effectiveness of that program in Table 1 on page 8. The applicant notes that the proposed project when implemented will cause little disruption to normal classroom functions which will be important to school staff buy-in. The applicant provides information on the partner schools which is helpful - Table 3, page 9.

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: 30

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 extent to which performance feedback and continuous improvement are integral to the design 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:

   The applicant gives clearly defined and measurable goals on page 11. The outcomes chart on the same page also includes comparative data about the non-treatment group. The logic model on page 12 was helpful and includes

stakeholders. The applicant provides a novel approach with the acknowledgement of the potential for risk factors to the success of the project. A robust management plan is given with milestones and timelines was given on page 15. The applicant plans to assembly a team of experts to help with management and implementation of the project. The Chart on page 20 outlines the applicant's plan for gaining feedback including a unique annual summit for reporting to stakeholder on the project. The applicant's dissemination plan on page 20 includes journal articles, professional meetings, and an innovative idea to share project lesson plans with other educators.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were noted.

Reader's Score: **50**

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Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 07/11/2017 05:00 PM

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 07/11/2017 04:56 PM

Technical Review

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) (U411C170020)
Reader #3: **********

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	30	28
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Management	50	48
Sub Total	80	76
Total	80	76

Panel #3 - EIR - Early Phase - Content - 3: 84.411C

Reader #3: **********

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) (U411C170020)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

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

    (1) The national significance of 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 represents an exceptional approach to the priority or priorities established for the competition.

    Strengths:

    The rationale behind the study is established on page 2 and show its national significance. Nationwide, 2.8 million students are suspended mostly Black students, Hispanic students and students with disabilities. Higher suspension rates are closely correlated with higher dropout (see example of disparities- Table 2 -page 9). On the graduation rate, Hispanic and Black students as well as low-income students (whose category they often belong too) fall well below the national average. Through an experimental study conducted to measure program impacts on social-emotional learning (SEL) and student academic engagement and behavior, this project will provide schools across the country with tested resources to implement such program (page 1).

    The project addresses Absolute Priority 1: It is designed to serve high-need 6th graders in 10 middle schools in low-income, rural and urban communities in four states (Table 3 on page 9- School profiles). In each of the 10 schools, incoming 6th graders will be assigned to treatment or control group randomly. About 1500 will participate in the study. The program was a pilot in 2014-15 in one middle school in NYC, then expanded to 14 new schools over two-years in NJ and NYC. The purpose of this study is to implement and evaluate PGC-MS in 10 new schools as part of the first cohesive scaling and evaluation strategy (page 5). Then, six urban and rural communities in four states will be added to develop a package of services and materials that will allow for scalability and replicability in diverse communities nationwide.

    It addresses also Absolute Priority 2: The transition to middle school tends to destabilize many students and often, a decline in motivation and academic achievement, as well as a change in attitude toward school and educators are observed. Using a prosocial approach to discipline is a way to promote healthy relationships and academic success which are crucial to prevent and reduce conflicts. It is even more important to improve relationships between educators, students and parents at the transitioning year between childhood and adolescence (page 3).

    Applicants are replicating and scaling a successful evidence-based high school mentoring practice (Peer-Group Connection- High School) that was designed to support and ease students' transition to high school. (Table 1 on page 8). This innovative strategy will develop a middle school transition and cross-age peer mentoring program for 6 grade students known as Peer Group Connection Middle School. This program will develop 8th graders leadership skills and these students will then serve as mentors to facilitate 6th graders adaptation to middle school. It will serve as a prosocial approach to school discipline. This project capitalizes on existing resources (school staff, older students, and credit-bearing middle school elective in the form of leadership course). It is grounded on strength promotion instead of risk-reduction and requires minimal change to the daily school routine as it is completely integrated in the regular daily schedule. Add to that, a team of key stakeholders will regularly review discipline data to help improve outcomes for all students (page 6). To support the expansion of this solution to serve substantially larger numbers of students, replicability and scalability strategies have been detailed in the proposal.

Weaknesses:

On page 2, applicants state that 'successful middle schools provide a safe climate, encourage and respect student voice, help student develop social and emotional skills and provide strong role models". It would have been interesting to see if such schools have the same profile as the schools in the study and if yes, what kind of programs have been successful there.

Applicants do not take into account student mobility and how it can affect the outcomes of the study.

Reader's Score: 28

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 extent to which performance feedback and continuous improvement are integral to the design 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:

Applicants have provided a comprehensive management plan, which includes detailed information about implementation of the 1st year of the grant, including: key milestones, staffing details, and a list of performance metrics, including baseline measures and annual targets (table 8 page 18, and table 9 page 20)

The logic model (page e69) includes inputs (funding, support and resources), and key components (Professional development for staff and 8th-graders training) and suggests how the intervention is likely to improve relevant short- and long-term student outcomes.

It is based on four goals (Table 4 page 11): Increase SEL and student engagement, improve academic achievement as measured by fewer course failures, decrease discipline incidents and further develop and evaluate project implementation and effectiveness. All goals, objectives and outcomes are clear and measurable: for example, goal #1 will be measured using student survey and school attendance. All measurements for goal # 1 will be done after one year of program participation and results will be compared to the students in the control group. Specific outcomes of this study are to examine the impact on the number of course failures as it is an indicator of students at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, and on the number of discipline incidents as removal from classroom can lead to the failure of the course (page 11). After one year, students in treatment group will see a 10% increase in their attendance rate and course failures among participants and suspension rate will decrease by 10%.

The responsibilities are well-defined (page 13) with a clear profile of the look-for in the participants (faculty advisors, and 8th-grade mentors) as well as the training and professional development they will receive. Peer mentors will be matched with their co-mentors with attention to diversity. Each pair will be mentoring the same group of 8 to 10 sixth graders for the whole year.

Roles and responsibilities of the partners are presented in table 6, page 17.

The project timelines and milestones is based on four phases (table 8 page 18). Phase one performance target is about finalizing the program intervention and evaluation at the pilot level at the end of year one. It plans to start in March 2018 after USED approval. Phase 2 follows the program implementation and evaluation of a cohort of 5 schools. Phase 3 and 4 follow the implementation and evaluation of a second cohort of 5 schools. Program will be evaluated yearly. Phase four is about project scalability (in 2021), dissemination, sustainability and replication in additional middle schools after project complete full evaluation (Aug. 2022).

Feedback and continuous improvement: Data will be collected to assess progress and make mid-course corrections, in order to interpret the efficacy of the intervention, and identify conditions necessary for sustainability and effective

replication. Measures include program dosage, regular observations by trained observers of the intervention in action, fidelity monitoring logs, faculty advisor and student feedback forms and focus groups, and assessments of relationship quality completed by 6th graders about their peer leaders (table 9- Page 20)

Dissemination will be through Public Availability of Results: journal articles, presentations at professional conferences, information sessions and webinars to learn about the project. A report of lesson learned and evaluation results will be provided to administrators and stakeholders pf participating schools. Research results will be posted on different website.

Weaknesses:

Participants fail to address how they could replicate the program in K-8 schools where transitioning to 6th-grade is still a difficult process even when students have attended the same school in 5th grade.

Reader's Score: 48

Status: Submitted
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