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

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/02/2022 02:31 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)
Reader #1:   **********

		Points Possible	**Points Scored**
Questions			
Selection Criteria			
Significance			
1. Significance		20	20
Quality of Project Design			
1. Project Design		30	25
Quality of Project Personnel			
1. Project Personnel		10	3
Quality of the Management Plan			
1. Management Plan		10	10
Quality of the Project Evaluation			
1. Project Evaluation		30	0
	Sub Total	100	58
Priority Questions			
Competitive Preference Priority			
Competitive Preference Priority 1			
1. Promoting Equity		3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 2			
1. COVID-19		3	2
	Sub Total	6	5
	Total	106	63

Technical Review Form

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

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 20

Sub

1. **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. (20 points)**

    Strengths:

    The proposal demonstrates a promising new strategy that builds on prior research. The research states that Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies promote students' well-being, foster more positive and fewer negative social behaviors and interactions, and improve test scores and grades. However, the highest quality SEL programs focus on elementary aged students. This proposal will focus on the high quality SEL programming for Middle Schools (e18).

    Weaknesses:

    No weaknesses noted.

    Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 25

Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework. (10 points)**

    Strengths:

    The conceptual framework of the proposal is strong and aligned to the quoted data. The activities are clearly aligned to the framework. SPARK is a universal, school-based intervention designed to help participants gain a

better understanding of themselves and others, develop vital social and emotional regulation skills, access their creative intelligence, and cultivate their personal potential (e15). The program is delivered in 30-minute sessions covering one module per week. The core curriculum consists of 12 lessons that focus on practicing mindfulness, understanding the mind and human experience to uncover one's own resiliency and potential (e21).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

2. **(2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. (5 points)**

Strengths:

The goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly stated and are measurable. The outcomes will be measured by teacher ratings for students in class behavior, student ratings of the program, and supervisor. School and classroom discipline records will also be analyzed to note a decrease in incidents and a decrease in severity of incidents (e99).

Weaknesses:

No weakness noted.

Reader's Score: 5

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs. (15 points)**

Strengths:

The proposal is appropriately designed to specifically meet the needs of middle school students. The SPARK pre-teen curriculum was developed based on the latest research regarding effective interventions for cultivating early adolescents' SEL. The program aims to reduce risk factors, build resiliency, promote emotional well-being, and facilitate school success in youth between the ages of 10 to 13 years (e23).

Weaknesses:

The design does not address professional development or training for teachers. It is unclear when and how the teachers/facilitators of the program will be taught how to deliver the SPARK lessons.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project. In determining the quality of project personnel, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 3

Sub

1. **The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. In addition, the Secretary considers the qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. (10 points)**

   Strengths:

   The team members who have been selected clearly have the relevant training and experience to support the objectives, goals, and outcomes of the project. For example, the project director has expertise in data collection and analysis, has experience leading large SEL projects, and has been a lead co-investigator on of an SEL program study (e28).

   Weaknesses:

   The application does not address encouraging applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented.

   Reader's Score: 3

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

1. **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. (10 points)**

   Strengths:

   The clear management plan in place is organized in order to achieve the objectives of the SPARK proposal on time and within budget. The project team will meet weekly to discuss the project tasks and activities to keep them on schedule and within budget. The principal investigator and co-investigator will be responsible for overall management of the project including financial oversight (e115).

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses noted.

   Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

Reader's Score: 0

1. **(1) 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 standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice). (20 points)**

   Strengths:

   Weaknesses:

   Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. (5 points)**

   Strengths:

   Weaknesses:

   Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation. (5 points)**

   Strengths:

   Weaknesses:

   Reader's Score:

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 1:**

   Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities (up to 3 points).

   Projects designed to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students in middle school or high school that examine the sources of inequity and inadequacy and implement responses, including rigorous, engaging, and well-rounded (e.g., that include music and the arts) approaches to learning that are inclusive with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, language, and disability status and prepare students for college, career, and civic life, including one or more of the following:

(a) **Student-centered learning models that may leverage technology to address learner variability (e.g., universal design for learning (as defined in this notice), K–12 competency-based education (as defined in this notice), project-based learning, or hybrid/blended learning) and provide high-quality learning content, applications, or tools.**

(b) **Middle school courses or projects that prepare students to participate in advanced coursework in high school.**

(c) **Advanced courses and programs, including dual enrollment and early college programs.**

(d) **Project-based and experiential learning, including service and work-based learning.**

(e) **High-quality career and technical education courses, pathways, and industry-recognized credentials that are integrated into the curriculum.**

Strengths:

The proposal clearly introduces a program that promotes educational equity. The applicant states that SPARK is designed to serve all students but has been designed specifically to meet the needs of traditionally marginalized and underserved students. SPARK integrates diversity, inclusion, and equity principles into all elements of content and delivery. SPARK program developers have purposefully incorporated student feedback in program refinements to ensure that program content resonates with all students and creates an environment of safety and inclusion (e15).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 2:**

   Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Students, Educators, and Faculty (up to 3 points).

   Projects that are designed to address the impacts of the COVID–19 pandemic, including impacts that extend beyond the duration of the pandemic itself, on the students most impacted by the pandemic, with a focus on underserved students and the educators who serve them through:

   (a) conducting community asset-mapping and needs assessments that may include an assessment of the extent to which students, including subgroups of students, have become disengaged from learning, including students not participating in in-person or remote instruction, and specific strategies for reengaging and supporting students and their families; and

   (b) using evidence-based instructional approaches and supports, such as professional development, coaching, ongoing support for educators, high quality tutoring, expanded access to rigorous coursework and content across K–12, and expanded learning time to accelerate learning for students in ways that ensure all students have the opportunity to successfully meet challenging academic content standards without contributing to tracking or remedial courses.

   ### Strengths:

   The proposal includes sound evidence-based instructional approaches that will make SEL lessons accessible to all Middle School students. The core curriculum consists of 12 lessons that focus on practicing mindfulness, understanding the mind and human experience to uncover one's own resiliency and potential. Between supplemental lessons students practice their new skills in real-life interactions, and they discuss those experiences in the next session (e21).

   ### Weaknesses:

   a) The applicant does not include information regarding asset mapping or needs assessments that were conducted within the target community where SPARK will be housed.

Reader's Score: **2**

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Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/02/2022 02:06 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)
Reader #2:   **********

		Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions			
Selection Criteria			
Significance			
1. Significance		20	20
Quality of Project Design			
1. Project Design		30	30
Quality of Project Personnel			
1. Project Personnel		10	5
Quality of the Management Plan			
1. Management Plan		10	10
Quality of the Project Evaluation			
1. Project Evaluation		30	0
	Sub Total	100	65
Priority Questions			
Competitive Preference Priority			
Competitive Preference Priority 1			
1. Promoting Equity		3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 2			
1. COVID-19		3	3
	Sub Total	6	6
	Total	106	71

Technical Review Form

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

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: **20**

   Sub

   1. **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. (20 points)**

      Strengths:

      The applicant satisfactorily lays out the details for a promising new strategy to build social emotional learning (SEL) into the middle school population through an evidence-based approach. For instance, the applicant persuasively explains that there are limited options for any school to implement an evidence-based program for middle school students as only one program currently exists and this program focuses on substance use, not SEL (e18). Therefore the applicant is providing this research-based programming as an alternative to an existing strategy by providing social emotional learning to middle school students.

      Weaknesses:

      No weaknesses noted.

      Reader's Score: **20**

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: **30**

   Sub

   1. **(1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework. (10 points)**

Sub

> **Strengths:**
>
> The applicant provides an adequate conceptual framework underlying the proposed research and activities that builds upon the inputs from effective social emotional learning research results. For instance, for its research model, the applicant will incorporate four practices from existing SEL research: sequences activities, active forms of learning, focused time, and explicit learning objectives (e20).
>
> **Weaknesses:**
>
> No weaknesses noted.
>
> **Reader's Score:** 10

2. **(2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. (5 points)**

> **Strengths:**
>
> The applicant sufficiently explains the intended goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project and describes a specific and in-depth plan for evaluating the outcomes. For instance, the applicant indicates that to measure the project's impact on targeted student SEL outcomes, treatment and control students will complete the Social Skills Improvement System at the beginning and end of each 16-week SPARK implementation. With validation and reliability analyses in place to interpret results, the applicant indicates that students will rate the extent to which each of 46 behavioral statements apply to them, on a four-point Likert scale (e26).
>
> **Weaknesses:**
>
> No weaknesses noted.
>
> **Reader's Score:** 5

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs. (15 points)**

> **Strengths:**
>
> The applicant amply describes the needs of the target population and how the proposed project will address those needs. Specifically, the applicant indicates that the curriculum to be used for the proposed project is based on recent research pertaining to effective interventions for developing and enhancing the social emotional learning of the pre-teens, who are the target participants (e23).
>
> **Weaknesses:**
>
> No weaknesses noted.
>
> **Reader's Score:** 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project. In determining the quality of project personnel, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 5

> **Sub**

> 1. The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. In addition, the Secretary considers the qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. (10 points)

> **Strengths:**

> The applicant provides ample information to indicate that the professionals proposed to fill the key personnel positions reflect an extensive set of skills with appropriate experience and training. For instance, the Associate Project Director has over 20 years of experience in education research and expertise in the development of social-emotional skills, survey methodology, and research design (e28).

> **Weaknesses:**

> The applicant does not address any proposed plan to encourage applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.

> **Reader's Score:** 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 10

> **Sub**

> 1. 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. (10 points)

> **Strengths:**

> The applicant proposes a detailed plan to ensure that it will achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget. For example, to meet the expectations of this selection criteria, the applicant references strategies, such as weekly project team meetings, to discuss the project tasks and activities to keep the project team on schedule and within budget, and then details the milestones, timeframe, and responsible party for each step of the proposed project (e30-e32).

> **Weaknesses:**

> No weaknesses noted.

> **Reader's Score:** 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

Reader's Score: 0

Sub

1. **(1) 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 standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice). (20 points)**

   Strengths:

   Weaknesses:

   Reader's Score:

2. **(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. (5 points)**

   Strengths:

   Weaknesses:

   Reader's Score:

3. **(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation. (5 points)**

   Strengths:

   Weaknesses:

   Reader's Score:

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 1:**

   Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities (up to 3 points).

   Projects designed to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students in middle school or high school that examine the sources of inequity

and inadequacy and implement responses, including rigorous, engaging, and well-rounded (e.g., that include music and the arts) approaches to learning that are inclusive with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, language, and disability status and prepare students for college, career, and civic life, including one or more of the following:

(a) Student-centered learning models that may leverage technology to address learner variability (e.g., universal design for learning (as defined in this notice), K–12 competency-based education (as defined in this notice), project-based learning, or hybrid/blended learning) and provide high-quality learning content, applications, or tools.

(b) Middle school courses or projects that prepare students to participate in advanced coursework in high school.

(c) Advanced courses and programs, including dual enrollment and early college programs.

(d) Project-based and experiential learning, including service and work-based learning.

(e) High-quality career and technical education courses, pathways, and industry-recognized credentials that are integrated into the curriculum.

Strengths:

The applicant superbly presents a plan to implement a student-centered model with high-quality learning content. For instance, according to the applicant, the developers of the proposed project purposefully incorporated student feedback in program refinements to ensure that program content pertains to all participants, and lessons and activities are driven by student voices and experiences (e16).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 2:**

   Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Students, Educators, and Faculty (up to 3 points).

   Projects that are designed to address the impacts of the COVID–19 pandemic, including impacts that extend beyond the duration of the pandemic itself, on the students most impacted by the pandemic, with a focus on underserved students and the educators who serve them through:

   (a) conducting community asset-mapping and needs assessments that may include an assessment of the extent to which students, including subgroups of students, have become disengaged from learning, including students not participating in in-person or remote instruction, and specific strategies for reengaging and supporting students and their families; and

   (b) using evidence-based instructional approaches and supports, such as professional development, coaching, ongoing support for educators, high quality tutoring, expanded access to rigorous coursework and content across K–12, and expanded learning time to accelerate learning for students in ways that ensure all students have the opportunity to successfully meet challenging academic content standards without contributing to tracking or remedial courses.

   Strengths:

   (a)   The applicant suitably addresses the expectation of the preference priority that there be a means to assess the needs of students and the extent to which they may have become disengaged from learning. For instance, while the applicant has not yet conducted asset mapping or a needs assessment, it proposes to utilize the Social Skills Improvement System, which will assess students' needs and assets, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills, through answers to whether 46 behavioral statements apply to them (e26).

(b)   The applicant's proposed project uses evidence-based instructional approaches and supports for educators. For instance, the applicant indicates that the program is designed for facilitators to learn and benefit from the social emotional skills they teach, with a focus on training facilitators to be aware of their own wellness and state of mind (e23).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/02/2022 02:06 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)
Reader #3: **********

		Points Possible	**Points Scored**
Questions			
Selection Criteria			
Significance			
1. Significance		20	20
Quality of Project Design			
1. Project Design		30	29
Quality of Project Personnel			
1. Project Personnel		10	5
Quality of the Management Plan			
1. Management Plan		10	10
Quality of the Project Evaluation			
1. Project Evaluation		30	0
	Sub Total	100	64
Priority Questions			
Competitive Preference Priority			
Competitive Preference Priority 1			
1. Promoting Equity		3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 2			
1. COVID-19		3	3
	Sub Total	6	6
	Total	106	70

Technical Review Form

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

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: **20**

    Sub

    1. **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. (20 points)**

      Strengths:

      The applicant's SPARK model is a promising new strategy. According to the program's experimental study of 357 students in two middle schools SPARK has positive effects on communication, decision making, and problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, and resilience (e19). The model is building upon various SEL programs that were designed for elementary school students and the Lion Quest for Adolescence program which was designed for middle grades even though the program had impact only on substance abuse (e18).

      Weaknesses:

      No weaknesses

      Reader's Score: **20**

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: **29**

    Sub

    1. **(1) The extent to which there is a conceptual framework underlying the proposed research or demonstration activities and the quality of that framework. (10 points)**

      Strengths:

      The applicant's conceptual framework is adequately premised on ideas, assertions and theories that are relevant to guide students to uncover the innate capacity within themselves to navigate life challenges. The applicant develops

Sub

SPARK on the assertion that people possess the capacity for positive development and mental well-being and that the ability to navigate life experiences in a psychologically healthy way is strengthened through mindfulness and awareness of one's innate wisdom (e20).Furthermore, the applicant's SPARK programming has also been influenced by four SAFE practices that have been identified by researchers as important in undertaking SEL programs (e20).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses

Reader's Score: 10

2. **(2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable. (5 points)**

Strengths:

The applicant's goals are clearly defined. The applicant seeks to achieve three goals. These are, to evaluate the implementation and impact of the SPARK pre-teen curriculum, to expand SPARK delivery capacity by teachers and facilitators and to understand how the SPARK pre-teen impacts Social Emotional Learning (SEL) outcomes for middle school students (e19).

Weaknesses:

The applicant's objectives are too broad and not time bound. For example, in trying to meet the stated goals the applicant's objectives include conducting a pilot implementation and feasibility study and refining curriculum. This objective as stated is not adequately presented as measurable.

Reader's Score: 4

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs. (15 points)**

Strengths:

The SPARK program is designed specifically to meet the needs of traditionally marginalized and underserved students(e15). The project aims to reduce the risk factors, build resiliency, promote emotional well-being, and facilitate school success in youth (e20). The program is appropriate for children as it is participant driven and includes strategies for customizing lessons and activities to reflect the lived experience of incorporating their voices into the program.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project. In determining the quality of project personnel, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 5

Sub

1. **The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. In addition, the Secretary considers the qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. (10 points)**

   Strengths:

   The applicant's key personnel have requisite qualifications and experience that is relevant to the project. The leader of the project has over 20 years of experience in education research and has expertise in quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Also, the president of SPARK Initiative has over 25 years of experience as an education researcher (e29).

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant does not indicate if they will employ or encourage applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age or disability.

   Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

1. **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. (10 points)**

   Strengths:

   The applicant's project management plan is clear and feasible. Each milestone is assigned a responsible party and realistic timelines are set for each milestone. Furthermore, the project team will meet weekly to discuss the project and tasks and activities to keep them on schedule and within budget (e30).

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses

   Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

Reader's Score: 0

Sub

1. **(1) 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 standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice). (20 points)**

   Strengths:

   N/A

   Weaknesses:

   N/A

   Reader's Score: 0

2. **(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. (5 points)**

   Strengths:

   N/A

   Weaknesses:

   N/A

   Reader's Score: 0

3. **(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation. (5 points)**

   Strengths:

   N/A

   Weaknesses:

   N/A

   Reader's Score: 0

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 1:**

   Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities (up to 3 points).

   Projects designed to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students in middle school or high school that examine the sources of inequity

and inadequacy and implement responses, including rigorous, engaging, and well-rounded (e.g., that include music and the arts) approaches to learning that are inclusive with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, language, and disability status and prepare students for college, career, and civic life, including one or more of the following:

    (a) Student-centered learning models that may leverage technology to address learner variability (e.g., universal design for learning (as defined in this notice), K–12 competency-based education (as defined in this notice), project-based learning, or hybrid/blended learning) and provide high-quality learning content, applications, or tools.

    (b) Middle school courses or projects that prepare students to participate in advanced coursework in high school.

    (c) Advanced courses and programs, including dual enrollment and early college programs.

    (d) Project-based and experiential learning, including service and work-based learning.

    (e) High-quality career and technical education courses, pathways, and industry-recognized credentials that are integrated into the curriculum.

Strengths:

The applicant's project honors diversity and inclusion by integrating diversity, inclusion and equity principles into all elements of content and delivery(e16). Thus, the applicant's project meets criterion (a) above as the project is tailored to students in grade six through eight (e15).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 2:**

Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Students, Educators, and Faculty (up to 3 points).

Projects that are designed to address the impacts of the COVID–19 pandemic, including impacts that extend beyond the duration of the pandemic itself, on the students most impacted by the pandemic, with a focus on underserved students and the educators who serve them through:

    (a) conducting community asset-mapping and needs assessments that may include an assessment of the extent to which students, including subgroups of students, have become disengaged from learning, including students not participating in in-person or remote instruction, and specific strategies for reengaging and supporting students and their families; and

    (b) using evidence-based instructional approaches and supports, such as professional development, coaching, ongoing support for educators, high quality tutoring, expanded access to rigorous coursework and content across K–12, and expanded learning time to accelerate learning for students in ways that ensure all students have the opportunity to successfully meet challenging academic content standards without contributing to tracking or remedial courses.

Strengths:

a. The applicant has highlighted the significant psycho-social impact COVID 19 pandemic has had on students (e17). The applicant assessed students' needs through virtual discussion groups where, students, educators and parents recommended providing mental health services for students as a key strategy to help address COVID 19 related disruptions to students (e17). In addressing asset mapping the applicant identified the strength of each individual rather than their weaknesses. Thus it emphasizes on individual assets rather than deficits (e23). A focus on individual strengths and resilience supports a growth mindset that emphasizes the potential for development and improvement while avoiding blame on students for individual deficiencies (e12).

b. The applicant's model convincingly uses evidence-based instructional approaches and supports. The model builds upon various evidence-based SEL programs that were designed for elementary school students and the Lion Quest for Adolescence program which was designed for middle grades even though the program had impact only on substance abuse (e18).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 3

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)
Reader #1:   **********

	Points Possible	**Points Scored**
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	21
Total	30	21

Technical Review Form

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

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

Reader's Score: **21**

   Sub

   1. **(1) 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 standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice). (20 points)**

   Strengths:

   The applicant proposes to conduct a randomized control trial evaluation study with randomization at the classroom level across multiple sites. If well conducted, this has the potential to meet WWC standards without reservations.

   There will be an examination of the possible differential impact of facilitator and teacher led versions of the intervention. If teacher led interventions are successful, there is increased potential for the intervention to be widely adopted.

   The evaluation lead has the necessary experience and expertise to conduct a quality evaluation.

   Multiple measures with acceptable psychometric properties are employed. There will be an initial pilot study to test and improve the fidelity matrix. The proposed data analysis is appropriate to answer the evaluation questions which are asked.

   The intervention will be given to the control classrooms at the end of the evaluation.

   Weaknesses:

   The Fidelity Scale is an important element of the intervention. This is a teacher self-report which has significant potential to have exaggerated compliance reported.

   The applicant states that potential attrition of schools and teachers will be minimized through ongoing communication before randomization. The meaning and implementation of this assurance is unclear.

   There is a possibility for contamination of results within the evaluation design. This potential exists from both teachers and students. The proposal is silent on steps to minimize contamination from students. Strategy for teachers is asking them to not share information concerning the intervention, which has potential to be of limited effectiveness.

Sub

> The evaluation lead is an employee of the applicant. The level of independence is not made clear in the application. This may create an appearance of potential bias in the evaluation.

Reader's Score: 14

2. **(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. (5 points)**

   Strengths:

   There is a frequent use of fidelity measures to assess the extent to which the intervention is being appropriately implemented. Additionally, there will be monthly feedback meetings concerning both fidelity and outcomes.

   Weaknesses:

   There are no apparent weaknesses in this area

   Reader's Score: 5

3. **(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation. (5 points)**

   Strengths:

   The project components are defined. There is a specific curriculum that has been well identified and outcomes are specified.

   Weaknesses:

   There is no measurable threshold provided for acceptable implementation.

   There is insufficient specificity on the mediators and moderators which will be examined. It is therefore unclear the extent to which the evaluation will adequately define the schools, classrooms, and students which are most likely to benefit from the intervention.

   Reader's Score: 2

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Last Updated: 09/30/2022 03:27 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)
Reader #2: **********

	Points Possible	**Points Scored**
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	24
Total	30	24

Technical Review Form

Panel #8 - EIR Tier 2 - 5: 84.411C

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

Applicant: Research Triangle Institute (S411C220065)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

Reader's Score: 24

Sub

1. **(1) 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 standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice). (20 points)**

   Strengths:

   The applicant, RTI, will conduct the program evaluation. RTI has the resources and staff capable of completing the program evaluation. The evaluation plan has three components: a pilot test (to evaluate fidelity of implementation), an impact study of effects of SPARK delivered by certified SPARK facilitators on student social and emotional learning (SEL), and an exploratory study to evaluate impacts of teacher-delivered SPARK. To evaluate fidelity of implementation, RTI will use Fidelity Scales developed by the SPARK organization to evaluate the implementation of the SPARK program. The effects of SPARK on students' SEL will be evaluated using a clustered Randomized Controlled Trial where teachers in the treatment group will be blocked within schools within districts. This design has the potential to meet WWC standards without reservations, if well implemented. Schools within the control group will receive a stipend and their teachers will be able to participate in the SPARK program after the completion of the impact study. The application discusses potential threats to validity and how these will be addressed. Appropriate study outcomes, mediators and moderators are listed in the application. For the third evaluation component, RTI intends to conduct a Randomized Controlled Trial to evaluate the impacts of teacher-delivered SPARK. This study design has the potential to meet WWC standards without reservations if well implemented. The application includes a timeline (Figure 1) that indicates when data collection will take place. The evaluation plan has identified a difference-in-differences data analysis approach to evaluate the impact of program participation. It also includes a plan to evaluate the summer teacher training program using a pre-post data survey of teachers' SEL.

   Weaknesses:

   Because RTI is the applicant, it is not clear what actions RTI will take to ensure the evaluation is independent. All data collection is to be completed by RTI, but the application would be improved with the inclusion of methods to ensure the evaluation is independent. However, the fidelity scales are self-reported by the participants which could lead to biased outcomes. Although the application indicates that teachers in both treatment and control groups will receive a stipend, the budget statement in the application indicates that payment is made to schools and does not indicate the amount of the stipend that teachers will receive. It is not clear that the stipend amount will be sufficient to ensure the desired level of teacher participation. It is not clear if data will be collected and compared concerning the usual professional development programs received by the treatment and control groups It is also not clear if the

Sub

SPARK program that teachers in the treatment group participate in will be in addition to or instead of the regular teacher development programs.

Reader's Score: 16

2. **(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes. (5 points)**

Strengths:

The application identifies specific data analysis methods to evaluate the impact of the SPARK program, both with trained facilitators and trained classroom teachers. Including the data analysis methods indicates that the applicant and evaluators have considered the appropriate methods before collecting the data. The timeline provided in Exhibit 3 indicates when data will be collected and appropriate reports will be submitted. These feedback loops are further described within the evaluation plan. Including when the data will be collected indicates that the evaluation plan can be carried out timely.

Weaknesses:

None noted.

Reader's Score: 5

3. **(3)   The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation. (5 points)**

Strengths:

The application includes details on data to be collected to address each of the research questions. Aligning the evaluation with research goals indicates the potential to effectively address research questions. A power analysis was done to determine samples sizes needed to reach specified effect sizes. The use of a power analysis indicates the evaluation plan has the potential to detect a meaningful impact.

Weaknesses:

The application does not provide details about acceptable implementation thresholds (e.g., desired summary scores from the fidelity scales, desired percentage of SPARK lessons completed, etc.) It is not possible to meet goals that are not well defined. The application includes a list of potential mediators and moderators but does not provide appropriate definitions of these factors. Without identifying potential mediators or moderators the evaluation has the potential to be biased.

Reader's Score: 3

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