

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/29/2022 10:14 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

Reader #1: *****

	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	10
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	0
Sub Total	100	70
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	75

Technical Review Form

Panel #17 - EIR Early Phase - 17: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

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 provided an exhaustive description of the extent to which the proposed project, Circle Up, implements and builds upon evidence-based, traditional, and promising educational strategies to address student needs. CAST and partners will “adapt and integrate research-based components, Universal Design Learning (UDL), the Check & Connect (C&C) mentoring program, and Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS)” to “improve student social-emotional learning (SEL) and engagement in school, leading to gains in academic achievement and attainment” (e20). Through implementation of these strategies as core components, Circle Up proposes to address the shortcomings of traditional SEL programs and provided in Exhibit 1 (e24-e25), the shortcomings that will be addressed in the proposed project and the response of Circle Up to address the shortcomings.

The applicant provided a specific example in Exhibit 1(e24) to document how the promising strategies will support the proposed project, Circle Up, while addressing the challenges of social emotional learning, such as the “Inability to reach students who are already disengaged/not attending school” (e24), (i.e., “Circle Up includes a structured-mentoring component (C&C) that addresses this need, to re-engage students and leverage insights about the broader community to inform classroom and school-based efforts” (e24).

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)**

Strengths:

The applicant provided a thorough discussion and extensive documentation to support the conceptual framework to be implemented in the proposed project, Circle Up. In summary, the applicant described Circle Up as an “ecological model within systems theory” (e26), where “the responsibility for meeting a student’s social, emotional, and academic needs is distributed among the contexts in which the student learns and develops: classroom, school, family, and community” (e26).

The applicant provided a comprehensive logic model to illustrate how the project’s inputs support project activities, how project activities will be coordinated, resulting in short and long term outcomes. For example, sample Inputs included-“EDC evaluation expertise, CPS intervention model; Activities-Pilot Study and program revisions, Impact Study; Short Term Outcomes-Decrease in behavioral referrals; and Long Term Outcomes-Systemic changes in disciplinary processes and procedures” (e26).

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 provided a highly detailed action plan that included clearly defined and measurable goals, objectives, and outcomes, which will effortlessly facilitate project implementation to achieve desired outcomes. The plan included four objectives inclusive of strategies, activities, and outcomes for each objective. For example, “Objective 3: Conduct an impact study of Circle Up with 12 intervention and 12 comparison schools from Aldine ISD” (e34), included the following information: “Strategy: 3.6. Collect impact data on Circle Up implementation; Activities: Collect impact data in Years 1 and 2 using revised impact measures; and Outcomes: Impact data on Circle Up implementation” (e34).

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 described in detail the demographics of the target population and how the implementation strategies will meet their needs. The target population for the Circle Up project are students enrolled in The Aldine Independent School district which comprise “83 schools, serving 63,000 students, where approximately 88% of their

Sub

students are classified as economically disadvantaged” (e35). The demographics also include the following statistics for the target population: “21% African-American, 75% Hispanic/Latinx, 88% Free/Reduced Meals, 17% English Learners, and 8% Disability” (Appendix J-6: Aldine ISD, Student Demographics (e119)).

The applicant provided a detailed summary and description of the proposed Circle Up 3-phase project plan (Phase 1: Iterative Co-Design and Design-Based Research, Phase 2: Pilot Study, and Phase 3: Impact Study and Dissemination) (e27-e30), supported by a foundation of three core evidence-based components to be implemented by partners, is uniquely designed to meet the needs of diverse populations as the goal of each component is focused on individual student needs.

To support how the strategies in Circle Up will meet individual student needs, the applicant provided a thorough description of three core components: 1) UDL will focus on the “barriers to learning that occur in the interaction between individual learner’s strength and challenges, and the curricula” (e30); 2) CPS, a psychosocial treatment model, will focus on identification of the challenging behaviors of each student, “enhancing the lagging skills that are contributing to those problems” (e31); and 3) C&C will “enhance student engagement at school and with learning for marginalized disengaged students in grades K-12 through relationship building, problem solving and capacity building and persistence” (e31-e32).

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: 10

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 provided a statement of their commitment to encourage applications from traditionally underrepresented individuals, and stated that: “CAST has policies and practices that promote the hiring and advancement of diverse personnel without regard to race, religion, color...”(e38) and also included documentation of the current percentage of the diversity of hires: “Currently 51% of CAST’s staff of 57 and 36% of its Board are 11 individuals with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, or members of a minority group” (e38).

The applicant provided an impressive summary of the Circle Up Teams & Leadership (Exhibit 3) (e36), which included a summary of each partner’s team members, their responsibilities, and the Curriculum Vitae for each leader (Appendix B) to further document the qualifications of each partner. For example, the Leadership Team information in Exhibit 3 included Dr. Jess Gropen (CAST), “cognitive scientist with expertise around executive functioning, student engagement, and self-regulation” (e36). The Curriculum Vita further documented the

Sub

qualifications of Dr. Gropen: “Jess Gropen, Ph.D. CAS, INC. Substantive expertise in executive functions; social-emotional learning; motivation; effective strategies to close learning opportunity gaps for English learners and students from low-income communities; development of mathematical and scientific thinking” (Appendix B).

Weaknesses:

No Weaknesses Noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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 provided a detailed Management Plan strengthened by the collaboration with experienced project partners with a shared mission and expertise to provide quality services that focus on outcome improvement for diverse populations. Partners will collaborate as an “interdisciplinary team” (e37) to ensure coordinated project implementation. The applicant further supported the expertise of each partner and also provided a summary, highlighting the relevant experiences the partners bring to support successful project implantation. The list of Circle Up organizational partners included: CAST (Lead), University of Minnesota-Institute on Community Integration, Lives in Balance-Collaborative & Proactive Solutions, and Education Development Center (e37).

To document the adequacy of the Management Plan to achieve project objectives, the applicant included (for each project year) specific strategies, statements of milestones, and the personnel/partners responsible for the accomplishment of each objective. For example, as documentation for “Objective 2: Launch and conduct a pilot of Circle Up with two partner schools from Aldine ISD,” (e38) the applicant provided the following information: “Milestone-2.1 Implement the Circle Up program in two pilot schools; Y2, Y3, Y4 (Project Years); Personnel-2 (Design & Implementation Team)” (e38).

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 provided a thorough discussion of the strategies in the proposed project, Circle Up, which is designed to promote educational equity for underserved students. The applicant also highlighted the effectiveness of UDL and SEL as evidence-based strategies the project will implement to provide guidance to address educational equity (e20, e23).

In support, the applicant provided an extensive description of the implementation strategies of the Circle Up project, which has a foundation of UDL and SEL, cited by the U.S. Department of Education to “provide a foundation for all communities to use evidence-based SEL strategies to advance the goals of equity and excellence in ways that are most meaningful to their local context” (Schlund et al, 2020; e-23).

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 applicant supported the use of assessments and provided a discussion of the processes to be implemented in Phase I of the project as needs assessments. The needs assessments methods included: “We will work with external evaluators to test and refine surveys and other data collection instruments, develop fidelity measures, refine the evaluation plan for the impact study, and recruit schools and staff for the Phase 2 pilot study” (e27-e28).

The applicant provided a thorough discussion of the approaches that will be implemented to address the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, including a discussion of how the proposed project, Circle-Up, will be responsive to needs of students impacted by Covid-19. The applicant also provided documentation with a description of the research-based components and strategies to be implemented by project partners. For example, the applicant provided the following information: “UDL will offer supports and options for trauma’s impacts on language, executive functioning, and self-regulation” (e23). CPS and C&C will “help to mitigate trauma’s impact on students by identifying feelings and fostering new perspectives by building strong relationships between students and adults in the school” (e23).

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not include documentation that community asset-mapping would be completed to address the impacts of the COVID–19 pandemic.

Reader's Score: **2**

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Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

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	10
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	0
Sub Total	100	70
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	3	1
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. COVID-19	3	0
Sub Total	6	1
Total	106	71

Technical Review Form

Panel #17 - EIR Early Phase - 17: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

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 cited research regarding students with mental health concerns are prone to experiencing long-term impacts based on various risk and protective factors, such as exclusionary discipline practices (p. e22). In addition, historical data has demonstrated that exclusionary discipline disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and people of color (p. e22). The proposed project seeks to improve upon existing strategies in response to the student health crisis through the social-emotional learning (SEL) model. The applicant identified six common shortcomings that are addressed through its proposed project. For instance, it identified one shortcoming as the lack of SEL integration with academic learning throughout the day. It plans to address the shortcoming by integrating SEL-academic programs that support the whole student without sacrificing academic rigor and content (p. e24).

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 conceptual framework underlying the proposed research is based on an ecological model within systems theory (p. e26). The responsibility for meeting students' social, emotional, and academic needs are distributed in the environment in which students learn and develop (i.e., classroom, school, family, and community).

The applicant included a logic model containing inputs (i.e., staff and expertise), activities (i.e., co-design of integrated SEL model), short-term outcomes (i.e., teachers develop stronger relationships with students), and long-term outcomes (i.e., teachers develop a greater understanding of and empathy for students) (p. e26).

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 provides a primary goal (i.e., to develop, implement, and test a whole-school, integrated model for meeting students' social, emotional, and academic needs, particularly for high-needs students), four objectives (i.e., objective 2: to launch and conduct a pilot of the proposed SEL program with two partner schools from a predetermined school district) (p. e27), and outcomes (i.e., launch of the SEL program; pilot data and results from measures) are clearly specified and measurable (p. e33).

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 seeks a partnership with a predetermined school district that has 88% of its students classified as economically disadvantaged, while 71% are deemed at-risk. The demographics comprise 98% of students identifying as Black, Indigenous, and people of color. The proposed project aims to reduce disproportionality through intensive SEL support (p. e35). For instance, the applicant intends to implement collaborative and proactive solutions, which is an evidence-based psychosocial treatment model that is proven to reduce challenging behaviors (p. e31).

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: 10

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 encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on its policies and practices that promote the hiring and advancement of diverse personnel. For instance, 51% of current staff and board of directors are individuals with disabilities or members of a minority group (p. e35).

The applicant provides qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel (leadership team, design & implementation team, evaluation team, and advisory board & consultants). The three-member leadership team has expertise in executive functioning, student engagement, self-regulation, whole-school implementation of Universal Design for Learning, and integration of an SEL model within academics (p. e36).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted

Reader's Score: 10

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 states that staff from across the partners will work in interdisciplinary teams to ensure a cohesive approach to project activities. The applicant provides a 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. For example, in years 2 and 3, the leadership team and the evaluation team would be responsible for achieving the milestone of developing fidelity and impact instruments (p. e37).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted

Sub

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 proposed project intends to address equity issues through Universal Design for Learning and evidence-based social-emotional learning strategies (p. e23)

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not address how the proposed project intends to prepare students for college, career, and civic life.

Reader's Score: 1

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:

No strengths noted

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not address a plan for conducting community asset-mapping and needs assessments. Additionally, the applicant did not address 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.

Reader's Score: **0**

Status: Submitted

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Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/29/2022 09:56 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

Reader #3: *****

	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	10
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	8
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	0
Sub Total	100	68
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	73

Technical Review Form

Panel #17 - EIR Early Phase - 17: 84.411C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

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 proposed project is intended to serve 7,850 students in 4th and 5th grades, to develop and test a program for SEL that will integrate Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Check & Connect (C&C) mentoring support, and Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS).

The applicant provides a research basis for the proposed project and offers an innovative integration of the three evidence-based strategies, creating a promising new strategy (e20-e22). The proposal provides a rationale for their approach by listing common shortcomings in current SEL programs and their proposed solutions (e24-e25).

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 a conceptual framework, including a logic model and narrative. The framework is clear and easy to understand, with logical outcomes that align with project activities (e26-e27).

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 proposal provides clearly defined objectives with related strategies, activities, and outcomes which support project goals. Outcomes can be measured through planned surveys, academic assessment data, and other school data (e122-e126). The plan is designed for success and accountability (e32-e35).

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 describes the demographics of the intended target population (e35) and research that demonstrates the proposed strategies are appropriate to meet the needs of this student population (e20-e21).

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: 10

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)

Sub

Strengths:

The applicant provides assurances of policies and practices that promote diverse personnel and gives current staff demographics to demonstrate success in attracting and retaining employees from underrepresented groups (e35). The proposal provides a summary of key personnel, their areas of responsibility, their educational backgrounds and experience. Organizational leaders and related consultants have appropriate qualifications and expertise that provide a strong foundation for the program's likely success (e36).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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: 8

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 proposal provides a high-level overview of the timeline for major activities and the teams responsible for each task (e37-e38). The budget focuses on personnel costs and some related travel costs (e106).

Weaknesses:

Responsibilities are defined to each team and individual responsibilities are discussed in summary, but the plan does not clearly lay out responsibilities for individual accountability. This may impact the ability to monitor progress toward goals.

Reader's Score: 8

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**

Sub

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 proposed program includes universal design for learning as a fundamental strategy for improving educational equity in classrooms and schools. The program will incorporate Collaborative & Proactive Solutions to support SEL and engagement, as well as to reduce concerning behaviors and discipline occurrences (e21-e22).

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 applicant plans to address the impacts of COVID-19 through evidence-based strategies, including Universal Design for Learning and Circle Up, a mentoring program to support students (e22-23).

Weaknesses:

The proposal does not address a plan to conduct a needs assessment or community asset mapping (e22-23).

Reader's Score: 2

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/29/2022 09:56 AM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 10/12/2022 06:19 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	28
Total	30	28

Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - EIR Tier 2 - 4: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

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: 28

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 evaluation plan design will be a Quasi Experimental Design (QED) with matched controls of an intervention implemented at the school level while measuring both teacher and student outcomes. The project team's goal is to recruit 24 schools, with 12 treatment schools and 12 control schools, with approximately 240 teachers and approximately 7,200 students to engage an adequate sample size. The mechanism of matching is well described, noting the project team will make use of student demographics, socio-emotional learning and academic data, and school-level information (e40). The project team plans to employ interrupted time series as their method of analysis, which is allowable under What Works Clearinghouse standards. They will access several years of student outcome and demographic data, as shown neatly in table format in the narrative (e40). Additionally, due to the availability and attention to these data, the project team will be able to establish baseline equivalence following What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards for QEDs. The main outcomes proposed will likely meet WWC standards for outcomes as they are either administrative in nature or captured via well validated tools (e41, e115-e116, e122-e123). As such, there are no confounds of concern. The level of detail and thoroughness of this section in this proposal is a strength and demonstrate strong potential that the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards with reservations.

Weaknesses:

The letters of support do not attest that the applicant will have access to the proposed administrative data. Noting that a significant amount of the project's baseline data and outcomes rely on these data, this constitutes a weakness, because if the applicant does not have access, then the study would not meet WWC standards.

Reader's Score: 19

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)

Sub

Strengths:

This section of the proposal is well developed. In the first phase, the project team will collect qualitative and quantitative data and also plans to embed feedback into the intervention for the next two phases of implementation (e28). These feedback loops will enable the applicant to incorporate necessary changes and make improvements to implementation. Continuous refinement is threaded across the three phases, is informed by stakeholder feedback (e13, e32), and is targeted in the research questions (e39). In a similar vein, the applicants will create, test, and hone several measures to capture the outcomes of interest (e27-e28, e33). Additionally, the research team plans to meet bimonthly to discuss formative data and needed changes (e44). Altogether, the extent to which the project plans are likely to capture feedback and implement changes is high.

Weaknesses:

It is not entirely clear what data the applicant will employ to track progress toward outcomes. For example, by tracking a proxy to socio-emotional learning (SEL) during the school year, such as attendance or level of participation in class, the applicants would be able to have a sense of whether they are on track to meet their SEL outcomes of interest at the end of the intervention. Additional detail is necessary to understand what data the project will use to monitor progress for each outcome.

Reader's Score: 4

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 outcomes are very well outlined and listed according to their What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) domain, and include teacher and student outcomes (e41, e122-e123). The analysis will account for the nested nature of the data and will estimate a school-level impact of the intervention (e41). Mediators include teacher self-efficacy and moderators include demographic teacher and student variables (e39, e41-e42). The methods and research questions that the project plans to use to investigate moderators and mediators are well explained (e41-e42) and should allow the project team to capture a holistic understanding of how the intervention works and to identify necessary components to scale it up. The project team will holistically measure fidelity with tools such as attendance logs, observations, and feedback forms (e43). The applicant provides some examples of what they expect those thresholds will be both in the narrative (e43) and in an appendix (e124-e126). Fidelity is a core component of this intervention, and the applicant demonstrates having the tools in place to establish thresholds of implementation.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 10/12/2022 06:19 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 10/12/2022 01:53 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	29
Total	30	29

Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - EIR Tier 2 - 4: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: CAST, Inc. (S411C220169)

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: 29

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 evaluation will be a quasi-experimental design to meet the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards with reservations. The evaluation plan states that schools will not be randomly assigned to the intervention so selection bias will be addressed by using a matched comparison group of equivalent schools before the intervention (p. e39). The student sample of all 4th and 5th grade students using multiple prior year baseline cohorts within each school will yield a more precise baseline that strengthens the internal validity of the intervention effect estimates (p. e40). The impact study outlines academic achievement using state standardized assessment scores in math and reading, which is a reliable source of data. Social emotional well-being will include student self-report surveys that measure relationships, self-efficacy for academics, and student engagement. Additionally, the project team will track behavior using data sets such as absences, truant days, tardy days, suspensions, and behavior referrals. This data is routinely collected in the district, which reduces the burden for collection by the project team. Appendix J-8 (p. e121) provides the impact analysis model for short, interrupted time series with matched comparison schools, which is appropriate for this project. The minimum effect size of .33 is moderate and is based on estimates of 75 students per grade, per cohort year at each of the 24 schools, which include 12 intervention schools and 12 comparison schools (p. e40). The comprehensive evaluation design is robust and clearly meets the criteria for the WWC standards with reservations.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are observed.

Reader's Score: 20

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 evaluator will work with the program to co-develop fidelity measures, which the project team will combine with other implementation data to gain information for program improvement. For example, the project data will include

Sub

attendance logs, observations, feedback forms, surveys, and focus groups. Additionally, district-wide surveys will provide a measure of school climate and supports for social emotional learning (SEL) and family perceptions. Appendix J-9 (p. e122-e123) lists the measures including indicators, data sources, reliability and validity evidence. Bi-monthly meetings with school and project staff will provide opportunities to share feedback at the school level and identify schools for more in-depth examination to identify potential barriers and challenges. The staff will also discuss emerging findings to help inform modifications to the project management and implementation efforts. These performance feedback mechanisms support an increased likelihood that the project will be able to meet the intended outcomes.

Weaknesses:

The bi-monthly meetings may address project implementation, however, there does not appear to be regular and frequent meetings with the teachers and staff to gauge their involvement and their ideas for program improvement. The engagement of teachers and staff is a critical element for a SEL intervention to determine if the intervention is meeting the needs of students in the community.

Reader's Score: 4

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 applicant plans to measure implementation fidelity regarding whether the components of the intervention are delivered as designed, including the number, length, and frequency of activities. Additionally, the project team plans to measure the quality of delivery, as well as participant responsiveness and engagement. The proposed measures will be constructed from program data and interview data. Appendix J10 (p.e124-e126) lists draft fidelity measures including indicators, data sources and percentages to meet the threshold for fidelity. The fidelity measures appear comprehensive and demonstrate a plan to determine the role of implementation in achieving intended outcomes.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are observed.

Reader's Score: 5

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 10/12/2022 01:53 PM