

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/21/2023 05:47 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	12
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	40	35
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	15
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	0
Sub Total	100	62
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Sub Total	5	0
Total	105	62

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - EIR Mid-phase - 2: 84.411B

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

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 the following factors:

Reader's Score: 12

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.

Strengths:

The applicants have presented a plan grounded in their prior experience with this intervention and supported by previous research (e20-21). This research validates many aspects of the logic model they have outlined. Recognizing potential areas for improvement, the applicants propose to broaden their intervention, extending it to middle schools, making it available to teachers across all subjects in multiple states, and implementing it at the whole-school level (e24).

Weaknesses:

The applicants do not draw a clear link between their proposed new strategies and the foundation laid by their existing strategies. While they suggest an expansion, the rationale connecting the current and new strategies is absent. For instance, there is no mention of feedback, such as requests from principals or teachers through focus group research, or a needs assessment indicating a need for this intervention for older students. In essence, this section does not sufficiently demonstrate that the new strategies are a natural evolution or enhancement of the existing ones.

Reader's Score: 12

Selection Criteria - Strategy to Scale

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

Reader's Score: 35

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which the applicant identifies a specific strategy or strategies that address a particular barrier or barriers that prevented the applicant, in the past, from

Sub

reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application.

Strengths:

The applicants have pinpointed four distinct barriers to success from their past experiences with the intervention (e26). To address these barriers, they propose strategies that encompass a more robust whole-school approach. This includes offering enhanced professional development, engaging school administrators, and establishing in-school teams to facilitate effective implementation. Finally, this project proposes to build a comprehensive school-based team that directly impacts the applicant's ability to scale as well as sustainability.

Weaknesses:

The section lacks comprehensive evidence backing the identified barriers. The applicants do not thoroughly explain the methodology or context behind pinpointing these barriers. Moreover, there is a missing link between these barriers and how they previously impeded the scaling up of the intervention. The applicants did not sufficiently detail this in their narrative.

Reader's Score: 6

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

Strengths:

The narrative clearly lays out milestones, specifies meeting frequencies, and identifies the parties involved (e28-30). While a broad project timeline is offered (e28), the duties and roles of each team member are meticulously described. Any overlaps in responsibilities are kept to a minimal, ensuring the project's efficiency (e191).

Weaknesses:

The milestones presented are very broad, potentially impacting the applicant's capacity to meet them and fulfill the objectives both timely and within the allocated budget. The absence of benchmarks or more granular milestones in the table is a noticeable gap in this application.

Reader's Score: 4

- 3. (3) The applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional level (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) working directly, or through partners, during the grant period.**

Strengths:

The institution will provide assistance in fiscal and Institutional Review Board (IRB) management areas (e30, 32). A research lab, specializing in prosocial education, will further support the grant, leveraging their vast experience and their personnel's in-depth expertise in this domain (e31). A highlight is the pre-existing partnership among collaborators, underpinning the applicant's capability to scale the project. Key team members are explicitly mentioned, their competencies summarized, and their time commitment outlined (e32-34, 191). Notably, the team possesses considerable collective know-how in teaching, delivering professional development, and familiarity with rural school environments, which strengthens their abilities in executing this project in such settings. This skill set is further corroborated by the attached resumes (e74-133). The endorsement letters reflect that the applicants are primed to enroll the necessary schools for this project and will have the essential support and collaboration from these partners (e134-146).

Sub

Weaknesses:

None noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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

Strengths:

The applicant's strategy is multifaceted, incorporating various methods they have previously utilized. Specifically, they intend to connect with policymakers and school boards (e33). Their outreach approach spans traditional media outlets like talk radio and print media, as well as contemporary platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Collectively, these efforts reflect a comprehensive plan designed to engage a broad spectrum of audiences and foster continued development. A standout feature is the creation of an implementation toolkit as an open resource. This not only facilitates the dissemination process but also paves the way for future replication.

Weaknesses:

None noted.

Reader's Score: 10

- 5. (5) The likely utility of the products (such as information, materials processes, or techniques) that will result from the proposed project, including the potential for their being used effectively in a variety of other settings.**

Strengths:

The value of the products generated from this project promises to be substantial. Firstly, the toolkit, which will be freely accessible, will guide users from assessing the existing climate to pinpointing areas for improvement, and further, through the implementation process (e34). This feature represents a notable strength in this section. Subsequently, the distinct components of the dissemination plan are tailored to cater to specific audiences. For instance, researchers will find great value in the conference presentations and publications stemming from this project (e34).

Weaknesses:

None noted.

Reader's Score: 5

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: 15

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.**

Sub

Strengths:

The project's design is anchored in a robust research foundation (e18, 20-21, 23). The research provided lends credence to the connections the applicants suggest between inputs and the ensuing outputs/outcomes. As illustrated in their Logic Model (e35), the intervention is theorized to influence various areas, such as students' prosocial behavior, the frequency of disciplinary incidents, the quality of teacher-student relationships, the overall school climate, levels of academic engagement and achievement, and teachers' employment of prosocial education tactics, to name most. The activities slated to affect these outcomes are clearly detailed. Consequently, the conceptual framework underpinning the proposed initiative is both transparently delineated and grounded in evidence.

Weaknesses:

None noted.

Reader's Score: 5

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

Strengths:

The applicant clearly outlines their goals and corresponding objectives (e36). Their identified outcomes are quantifiable, particularly considering the instruments they have chosen (e178-181). For instance, to gauge outcomes like prosocial behavior, school climate, and classroom engagement, they will utilize established and rigorously validated tools (e37, 39). Additional data sources include administrative records, surveys from teachers and students, teacher observations, and qualitative methodologies such as focus groups (e37-40, 43). Given the well-structured objectives and research questions, the measurability of the outcomes, as highlighted in the application, is evident.

Weaknesses:

None 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.

Strengths:

The applicants' emphasis on rural high-poverty schools and underserved students is unmistakable (e20-21, 22, 23, 153). Their dedication to these groups is not only illustrated through the data they provide but also by the significant attention they give to the distinct challenges faced by rural schools and their teaching staff in this section. They highlight unique challenges such as teacher turnover and isolation that are prevalent in these settings. Furthermore, they present evidence supporting the idea that offering professional development, especially with a concentration on socio-emotional learning, can directly address and mitigate these concerns (e36).

Weaknesses:

None noted.

Reader's Score: 5

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 without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

2. (2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.

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.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

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

Strengths:

Sub

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: Implementers and Partners (up to 5 points)

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate how the project will be implemented by or in partnership with one or more of the following entities:

- (a) Community colleges (as defined in the NIA)
- (b) Historically Black colleges and universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (c) Tribal Colleges and Universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (d) Minority-serving institutions (as defined in the NIA)

Strengths:

This applicant did not apply for this category.

Weaknesses:

This applicant did not apply for this category.

Reader's Score: 0

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	0
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	40	0
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	24
Sub Total	100	24
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Sub Total	5	0
Total	105	24

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - EIR Mid-phase - 2: 84.411B

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

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 the following factors:

Reader's Score: 0

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.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Strategy to Scale

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

Reader's Score: 0

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which the applicant identifies a specific strategy or strategies that address a particular barrier or barriers that prevented the applicant, in the past, from reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Sub

Reader's Score: 0

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

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

3. (3) The applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional level (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) working directly, or through partners, during the grant period.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

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

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

5. (5) The likely utility of the products (such as information, materials processes, or techniques) that will result from the proposed project, including the potential for their being used effectively in a variety of other settings.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

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: 0

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.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

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

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

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.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

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:

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 without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).**

Strengths:

Overall, the applicant demonstrates a solid understanding of the WWC standards.

The applicant clearly describes student and teacher outcome measures to be used for their confirmatory analyses (e39-e40). The proposal describes these measures as measuring the constructs of outcomes of the intervention in the logic model (e35, e178-179).

The student outcome measures include: state standardized math, ELA, and science tests (considered valid and reliable by WWC); district/school records on disciplinary incidents (deemed valid and reliable by WWC); ED School Climate Surveys ($\alpha > 0.80$); Prosocial Behavior Scale (test-retest reliability=0.89); and Classroom Engagement Inventory ($\alpha = 0.84-0.91$) (e178, e180). These measures are either administrative records or developed and used in other research, do not over-align with the intervention, and meet the WWC's reliability standards.

Most of the proposed teacher measures also meet the WWC standards: district/state records on retention (considered valid and reliable by WWC); Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale ($\alpha = 0.94$); Teacher Burnout Inventory ($\alpha = 0.70-0.80$); Teacher Stress and Coping Indicators (test-retest reliability=0.46-0.58); and Student-Teacher Relationship Scale ($\alpha = 0.89$). In addition to self-assessed measures, the applicant proposes to conduct video-based classroom observations using CLASS-S as the coding tool. The CLASS-S is a widely used observational tool, and the applicant reports a 0.64-0.98 agreement rate in previous studies. (e178-e181)

To assess the impact of Prosocial and Active Learning Classrooms 2.0 (PAL), a school-wide intervention, the applicant proposes to conduct a school-level cluster RCT, blocking by state, district, and grades served. The schools are randomized to either the treatment or control group before 2025/26. The treatment schools are assigned to PAL during 2025/26, while the control schools are assigned to business-as-usual conditions. The control schools will receive the delayed intervention and participate in PAL in 2026/27. (e40)

The applicant expects a low level of attrition based on the prior experience with school-level RCTs, including the early-phase PAL study they conducted. The applicant also expects, per WWC, that there will be a low risk of bias due to student joiners and leavers, because the unit of assignment is at the school level and the unit of measurement is at the student level. The applicant acknowledges the potential risk of bias due to teacher turnover and plans to reduce the risk by excluding joiners from the analyses but keeping all students and teachers assigned initially to study conditions. (e41)

The applicant plans to recruit and randomize 80 schools. The applicant sufficiently demonstrates that this target sample size of schools is adequate to detect the meaningful level of impacts on student and teacher outcomes. The applicant calculates the minimum detectable effective sizes (MDES) based on reasonable and widely used parameter assumptions. The MDES calculation also assumes including a range of covariates in impact analysis, including baseline outcomes. Under a conservative scenario of 4 teachers and 80 students with 5% school attrition, MDES for student outcomes is 0.14, which the applicant describes as comparable to results reported by other research for outcomes of middle-school interventions on standardized tests. The applicant cites previous studies indicating that student behavioral outcomes can be more sensitive than test scores. MDES for teachers is larger, 0.25, comparable to other recent studies of program effects on teacher practices. (e42-e43, e185).

The applicant proposes to estimate intent-to-treat effects among teachers and students using two-level models, controlling for the clustering effects of schools. The applicant will adjust for baseline outcomes, student/teacher/school characteristics, and block indicators. The proposed statistical method for the confirmatory impact estimation is appropriate and consistent with the RCT design proposed.

Sub

(e41=42, e184-e185)

The applicant also proposes to explore whether and how impacts of PAL on student outcomes might be mediated by PAL impacts on teacher outcomes, based on the assumption that student outcomes are impacted directly by PAL and indirectly through improved teacher outcomes. This exploratory analysis does not meet WWC standards but is expected to help build evidence for PAL by unpacking the causal chain. (e185-e186)

Weaknesses:

The applicant proposes to use the measures developed by the evaluation team for some of the teacher outcomes: self-reported indicators for the use of discipline and praise (Teacher Survey items) and observed indicators for the use of prosocial strategies in the classroom (observation protocol items added to CLASS-S) (e40, e178-181). While the proposal notes that the evaluation team will pilot these measures (e177), the applicant does not sufficiently describe how they would check these the applicant-developed measures are reliable and not overaligned with the intervention.

The applicant indicates that state tests in science will be used as student outcome measures, in addition to math and ELA tests (e178). The applicant does not discuss the rationale for including the science tests, given that science tests are likely to be administered only at one middle school grade and that the grade tested for science and contents could vary from state to state. The applicant does not discuss if the science tests are comparable across states included in the study and how they plan to address missing science test data among the sample. Further, the applicant did not discuss if the assumption on the number of students per school for the MDES calculation is appropriate for science test scores (e42-e43, e185).

The applicant indicates that they will randomize schools in March 2025 and collect baseline data in July 2025 according to the main narrative (e29-e30, Table B1). The applicant also indicates that they will randomize schools in April-July 2025 and collect baseline data in Oct-Dec 2025 in Appendix J (e176-e177, Table J1a). The timing of the randomization is unclear, which may have implications for understanding the risk of teacher joiners.

While the applicant plans to exclude joiners in impact analysis to mitigate the risk of bias due to teacher turnover, the applicant does not fully discuss the extent of such a risk. Since the proposal indicates (e28) that the application will engage treatment schools to create implementation teams following the randomization in spring 2025, staff and teachers at participating schools (especially at treatment schools) are likely to find out the assignment status of their school and learn about the intervention in spring 2025. The knowledge about the intervention condition of the school may influence staff and teachers in their decision to remain at or transfer to and from a given study school for AY2025-26. The applicant does not discuss how they might minimize the potential influence of the randomization on teacher turnover between the school years or explain why this does not pose a concern for their study.

Reader's Score: 12

2. (2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.

Strengths:

The applicant proposes to conduct an implementation study to address to what extent PAL is implemented with fidelity, how the implementation of key components of PAL varies by school, teacher, and classroom characteristics, and what factors influence implementation. The applicant will use the program data (PR and meetings attendance records), focus groups, and interviews with teachers, teacher leaders, and school administrators. The implementation study is expected to provide feedback for program improvement and replications. (e38-e39, e43).

Sub

The applicant plans to generate guidance for scaling in other settings by involving a diverse sample, including implementation data from multiple sources, providing information about cost-effectiveness, and conducting a differential impact analysis (e44).

The applicant proposes exploratory analyses to investigate whether the impact of PAL is moderated by student, teacher/classroom, and school characteristics. Findings from the differential impact analysis are expected to inform where and among whom PAL is more effective (e44-e45).

The applicant proposes conducting a cost analysis using the ingredients method to calculate total and per-student costs for each component. They propose to differentiate start-up and ongoing costs and generate the effect of PAL on a per-dollar basis (e44).

The applicant proposes to register the study design, analysis plan, research questions, measures, and analytic methods with the Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies and document any changes to the evaluation plan (e45). The pre-registration of the evaluation plan supports transparency and independence of the evaluation, ensuring that the guidance it produces is credible.

Weaknesses:

The proposal names a “study-generate participant feedback survey” as a data source for the implementation study in Section D of the proposal narrative (e39, Table D1). However, the proposal does not explain this “participant feedback survey” (e.g., who will be surveyed and what will be asked). The survey is not mentioned elsewhere in the proposal, except that a similar survey is described in the Nonexempt Human Subject Narrative (e9). The proposal is unclear on the extent of the implementation data collection from teachers.

Under the Implementation Evaluation (e43), the applicant proposes to conduct up to 3 focus groups with teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators and conduct interviews with a purposive sample of up to 20 teachers, 10 lead teachers, and 10 school administrators (e28). To provide meaningful guidance on replications in different settings, the proposed numbers of focus groups and interviews are insufficient as the primary and only source, given that the proposed sample includes as many as 40 schools in a wide of diverse settings. (The applicant proposes to include a diverse group of 80 schools (40 in treatment) across multiple states, reflecting the variation in geography (rural, suburban, vs. urban), school size, and student-body compositions (e44).) As noted above, the applicant does not discuss other data sources, such as participant feedback survey of participants at treatment schools, to supplement the focus groups and interviews as part of the implementation evaluation.

The proposal does not clearly explain the role of AIR versus the Prosocial Development and Education Research Laboratory (ProLab), a MU unit. The proposal suggests that the proposed intervention is developed by ProLab and eMINT (e24). Throughout the project, ProLab will be closely involved in the management of the proposed project, along with eMINT, as well as in collecting and analyzing the feedback data during the pilot period for the revision and program development (e28). The proposal thus describes ProLab as a program developer of PAL, the intervention to be tested in the proposed efficacy study. ProLab is also described as a responsible party, along with AIR, for key evaluation activities, including all baseline and outcome data collection, processing, and analysis (e29-e30).

The extensive involvement of the program developer (ProLab) in the evaluation compromises the credibility of the evaluation results and resulting guidance on replication. While the applicant plans to preregister the evaluation design (e45), they do not explicitly discuss this concern about the applicant’s ability to produce effective guidance, or explain why ProLab’s influence in the evaluation is not a concern, or describe how they plan to address it.

Reader's Score: 4

Sub

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.

Strengths:

The applicant specifies the teacher outcome as the mediator affecting the impact on students and identifies student, teacher/classroom, school/district characteristics as potential moderators (e45-46). The applicant provides to conduct differential impact analyses of mediating and moderating effects to understand the relationship between student outcomes and teacher outcomes and between student outcomes and implementation context (e45-46, e185-187).

The applicant clearly articulates outcomes for the proposed impact evaluation and implementation study (e178-e179). The applicant specifies thresholds for acceptable implementation at the unit of observation and program levels (e182-e184). The applicant proposes to use the pilot data to finalize the metrics of fidelity and refine thresholds for acceptable implementation before the efficacy study phase (e177).

Weaknesses:

The proposal describes components as including “PD and mentoring for educators” (e45), which is not specific enough and does not identify key components that define PAL. The proposal refers to the logic model (e35, Figure C1), but it is unclear what key components are in the logic model. Further indicators identified for setting acceptable implementation thresholds (e182-e184, Exhibits J1d and J1e) are not clearly mapped with the logic model. It is unclear which components characterize the intervention.

The applicant specifies the threshold for acceptable implementation for teacher use of praise, induction, and discipline as the implementation (e184). However, these are identified as teacher outcomes in the proposed evaluation and are not appropriate to be used as measures of fidelity of implementation of PAL.

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

The evaluation team will meet with the implementation and project leadership teams biweekly throughout the project (both the pilot and efficacy study phases) to discuss implementation findings (e46, e177). The feedback during the pilot phase will inform the refinement of the intervention and the implementation. During the efficacy study phase, the evaluation team plans to share ongoing data-based feedback to eMINT (e178) and provide biannual evidence briefs and interim findings presentations.

Weaknesses:

The applicant’s description of the proposed feedback process is vague. They do not describe the intended purpose of the evaluation team’s periodic feedback in sufficient detail. For example, it is unclear whether the feedback process would include findings on the implementation progress for monitoring purposes, and/or recommendations for immediate adjustment to the ongoing implementation, and/or recommendations for improvement to the program design and implementation strategies for scaling.

Reader's Score: 4

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1:

Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners (up to 5 points)

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate how the project will be implemented by or in partnership with one or more of the following entities:

- (a) Community colleges (as defined in the NIA)
- (b) Historically Black colleges and universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (c) Tribal Colleges and Universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (d) Minority-serving institutions (as defined in the NIA)

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 08/21/2023 05:47 PM

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	12
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	40	31
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	11
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	0
Sub Total	100	54
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Sub Total	5	0
Total	105	54

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - EIR Mid-phase - 2: 84.411B

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

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 the following factors:

Reader's Score: 12

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.

Strengths:

The University of Missouri's proposal builds sufficiently on a previous Prosocial and Active Learning (PAL) Classroom project, simultaneously focusing on students' social-emotional wellness and relationships. The applicant provided relevant research-based evidence that students from diverse cultural backgrounds benefit from positive relationships with peers and teachers, which is the cornerstone of the proposed prosocial behavior program. (e9, e17-18)

Because teacher retention can be significantly impacted by students' social-emotional behaviors, this application holds promise for creating respectful and supportive environments for underserved students and teachers. By addressing multiple factors (e.g., diminishing respect for teachers and increases in discipline referrals), the project can potentially demonstrate to a large group of stakeholders how school leaders learn and take on more active roles in operationalizing prosocial education to improve student outcomes. (e17-18, e22, e26, e150)

Weaknesses:

The proposal lacks specificity in describing the PALS Classroom 2.0 program's design and how it will be implemented in middle schools. For example, the applicant noted that PALS does not add content to the curriculum. However, it is unclear exactly how teachers will engage students in learning learning PAL concepts at partner schools during the school day. (e150-158)

Reader's Score: 12

Selection Criteria - Strategy to Scale

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

Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the applicant identifies a specific strategy or strategies that address a particular barrier or barriers that prevented the applicant, in the past, from reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application.**

Strengths:

The applicants plan to offer a train-the-trainer certification model that allows teachers to become PAL Classroom 2.0 trainers in year five can potentially address issues with consistently providing training to teachers at rural schools. (e139, e148)

The project is strengthened by the applicants' intent to build core intervention teams comprised of teachers, counselors, and administrators at partner schools. This strategy will help ensure that key stakeholders are involved in understanding successes and challenges impacting the projects' implementation. (e25-27)

Weaknesses:

The applicant identifies conflicting school-level practices and a lack of school leader understanding as previous barriers. To this end, professional development (PD) sessions are proposed to engage teacher-leaders in learning mentoring skills and adult learning principles. However, the proposal lacks a sufficient discussion on the extent to which teachers at partner schools already possess these skills or if they are interested in this type of training. It is unclear whether teachers will fully buy into and ultimately benefit from these PD activities. (e26-27)

The project lacks a discussion on how barriers are aligned with strategies. For example, the proposal notes that school implementation teams will meet quarterly to complete tasks, such as examining policies, planning professional development activities, and identifying teacher leaders. However, it is unclear how these strategies are associated with conflicting school-level practices or the expense of in-person PD for rural schools. (e25-26)

Given the current teacher workload, the applicant lacks fully demonstrating that teachers who participate in the train-the-trainer model would have the support of their school-based administrators to participate in this opportunity and afforded the time to deliver training to staff within and outside of their districts. (e26-27)

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

During the summers of 2024-2025, the applicant plans to provide school implementation teams from high-poverty and rural middle schools a modest stipend for meeting to examine school climate factors and review policies and practices. This effort may encourage teachers to participate and actively develop solutions to implementation challenges. (e28-29, e205-207)

Weaknesses:

The applicant plans to host quarterly meetings comprised of the implementation team. The effectiveness of these meetings represented by core school teams can potentially be limited due to the infrequency of meetings.

Reader's Score: 3

3. **(3) The applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional**

Sub

level (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) working directly, or through partners, during the grant period.

Strengths:

The University of Missouri succinctly demonstrated its capacity effectively manage substantial fiscal projects, noting \$432 in research funding and existing infrastructure (e.g., assigned staff and an IRB process) for executing federal grant requirements. (e30)

The letters of support from the Michigan and Illinois Departments of Education and rural school district serve as strong indicators of the partners' confidence in the university's capacity to bring the project to scale regionally. It was evident that the applicant will most likely benefit from the support of these stakeholders during project implementation. (e134-146).

The applicant appropriately assembled an interdisciplinary team with expertise in teaching, professional development training, social-emotional and behavioral support, and research and evaluation. Collectively, these professionals can bring more perspective to project management and decision-making. (e74-e133)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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

Strengths:

The University of Missouri excels in demonstrating astute attention to devising a variety of methods (e.g., personal outreach, external reporting, three staff members responsible for sharing professional development content and resources, and regional meetings with stakeholders) for disseminating project information to stakeholders. (e33-34, e176-177, e190, e193)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

5. (5) The likely utility of the products (such as information, materials processes, or techniques) that will result from the proposed project, including the potential for their being used effectively in a variety of other settings.

Strengths:

The applicant noted that schools will receive an Implementation Toolkit containing open-source resources in year 5 of the grant. Teachers can potentially benefit from easy access to these open resources that may further advance their knowledge and help them build efficacy. (e34)

Weaknesses:

Teachers will be offered a book produced by the applicant that can be used in a book study. Because teachers typically have limited time to engage in professional development activities, the extent to which this resource will be read and used by teachers to positively influence their prosocial education practices is unclear. (e35)

Sub

Reader's Score: 4

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: 11

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.**

Strengths:

The University of Missouri constructed a logic model that appropriately links key resources to teacher and administrator activities, outputs, and outcomes. For example, it is feasible that prosocial education research can be used to strengthen professional development activities that will be leveraged to improve coaches' efficacy and performance during project implementation. (e 149)

Weaknesses:

The logic model is limited in capturing student inputs and activities that may contribute to short, medium, and long-term activities. Given this model, middle school students appear to take on a less active role in the development of their social and emotional growth. (e149)

Reader's Score: 3

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

Strengths:

PAL Classrooms 2.0 three goals, objectives, and measures were clearly specified in the proposal. Moreover, the data sources that the applicant plans to use to measure each objective are relevant for determining the project's impact on students and teachers. (e34-38)

Weaknesses:

Project goals 7, 8, and 9 establish 30% as a baseline for student increases in academic achievement, teachers' use of prosocial social strategies, and feelings of well-being. However, the grant narrative lacked sufficiently disclosing how these students' and teachers' thresholds were set, which would add transparency regarding whether they are appropriate given the project's design and scale. (e183, e208-211)

Reader's Score: 3

- 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.**

Sub

Strengths:

The proposal included a sophisticated analysis of the importance of relationships when working with underserved students. For example, credible research was shared to support the need to pair strong teacher relationships with prosocial emotional practices. This approach may more efficiently address substantial academic and behavioral challenges among students who exhibit anti-social behaviors and evidence of trauma in middle schools. (e154-158)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

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 without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

2. (2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.

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.

Sub

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

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

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: Implementers and Partners (up to 5 points)

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate how the project will be implemented by or in partnership with one or more of the following entities:

- (a) Community colleges (as defined in the NIA)
- (b) Historically Black colleges and universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (c) Tribal Colleges and Universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (d) Minority-serving institutions (as defined in the NIA)

Strengths:

The applicant did not apply for this criterion.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not apply for this criterion.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/21/2023 05:47 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/21/2023 05:47 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

Reader #4: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	12
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	40	40
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	15
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	0
Sub Total	100	67
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Sub Total	5	0
Total	105	67

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - EIR Mid-phase - 2: 84.411B

Reader #4: *****

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

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 the following factors:

Reader's Score: 12

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.

Strengths:

The applicant discussed the unmet demand for a scalable PL intervention focusing on prosocial behavior and classroom climate by (a) citing national data and research indicating decreased student social-emotional well-being, academic engagement, and sense of school community, and increased teacher stress and exhaustion in the post-Covid era, (b) reviewing studies showing that some groups of underserved students are disproportionately referred for misbehavior and disengagement resulting in fewer opportunities for these students to learn, and (c) reviewing research evidence that suggest that the presence of prosocial behavior is a stronger predictor of school success than the absence of negative behavior, especially for underserved students (pp. e17-e23).

The applicant responded to the elements of Absolute Priority 1 and 4 by demonstrating a moderately positive statistical effect of the proposed PL intervention on students' prosocial behavior and academic achievement in an Early-phase EIR study that provided professional learning to 5th-grade math and science teachers to promote prosocial, cooperative behavior among their students as students engaged in active, problem-based, team-oriented lessons (with an effect size of .14 on state math achievement tests). The proposed mid-phase EIR project is significant because it expands on the applicants' previous iteration of the PL intervention and involves the development, scaling, and demonstration of a comprehensive PL approach to improve educators' capacity to promote prosocial behavior of middle school students that the literature indicates to be predictive of academic achievement of all students, with larger demonstrated positive effects on the underserved student groups. (pp. e21-e22).

Weaknesses:

The extent to which the proposed PL intervention builds on the earlier iterations is not clear because the applicant included insufficient information about the impact of the proposed PL on teacher outcomes in the Early-phase EIR study. For example, information is missing regarding (a) the intervention's effect on varied teacher outcomes (including teachers' use of prosocial education strategies, self-efficacy, and teacher retention), and (b) the views of the participating early career and seasoned teachers regarding the usefulness of the PL intervention in helping them promote prosocial behavior and academic achievement of all students, including diverse groups of underserved students (pp. e21-e23).

Sub

Reader's Score: 12

Selection Criteria - Strategy to Scale

- 1. The Secretary considers the strategy to scale the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 40

Sub

- 1. (1) The extent to which the applicant identifies a specific strategy or strategies that address a particular barrier or barriers that prevented the applicant, in the past, from reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application.**

Strengths:

The applicant identified various barriers--including staffing, implementation fidelity, and travel challenges to deliver PL in rural settings--that prevented the applicant, in the past, from reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application. Applicant's proposed strategies are comprehensive and are likely to address the barriers of implementation fidelity of the SEL intervention and scalability in rural communities by (a) building a schoolwide implementation team of school leaders, counselors, teacher-leaders, classroom teachers, and other stakeholders, (b) providing professional development to build capacity of school administrators to support teachers' use of prosocial education strategies, (c) providing professional development for teacher leaders to improve their capacity to provide day-to-day coaching for other teachers at each participating school, (d) providing ongoing virtual professional development to teachers to improve teacher capacity and self-efficacy to promote prosocial behavior of middle school students, and (e) implementing a "train the trainer" approach via a certification program for district-level trainers to train teachers in the district for scaling and sustainability of the proposed intervention (pp.e24-e27).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found

Reader's Score: 10

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

Strengths:

The management plan specifies clearly defined responsibilities for project partners, timelines, milestones, and a budget narrative to support costs requested through grant activities for accomplishing project tasks on time and within budget to achieve the main objectives of the proposed project, including (a) planning, including sub-award and scope of work agreements, (b) developing professional learning tailored to the needs of school administrators, teacher leaders, and teachers, (c) implementing in pilot schools and refining the professional learning, (c) conducting a randomized trial evaluation of the professional learning intervention, (d) analyzing and disseminating findings and professional learning products (pp. e27-e30).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found

Reader's Score: 5

Sub

3. (3) The applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional level (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) working directly, or through partners, during the grant period.

Strengths:

Based on the resumes and support letters included, the applicant has the capacity in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, and management capacity to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional level via three teams with distinct responsibilities during the grant period. Specifically, the project leadership team has the capacity to (a) develop, refine, scale, evaluate large-scale professional development interventions to benefit the underserved schools in rural communities, (b) manage multi-site externally funded projects, (c) recruit and create strong partnerships with school districts across the country, and (d) disseminate broadly the products of large-scale projects to a wide range of stakeholders to support further development or replication. The project implementation team consists of qualified personnel to provide professional learning tailored to varied needs and strengths of school administrators, teacher leaders, and teachers. The independent evaluation team consists of experienced researchers who will evaluate the impact of the proposed training, support, and coaching structure on improving student prosocial behavior and student achievement in rural schools (pp. e30-e33, e74-e147).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found

Reader's Score: 10

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

Strengths:

The applicant's proposed mechanisms to broadly disseminate information on the project to support further development and replication target policy makers, school board members, school personnel, PL developers, and researchers by (a) having participating school personnel attend state school board meetings to discuss the transformation of their schools resulting from the project, (b) sharing information on the proposed project and findings via a dedicated project website, a video, social media channels, (c) hosting webinars and virtual regional workshops for practitioners, (d) sharing evidence-based strategies via self-explanatory resources, such as a book, to help teachers implement prosocial education strategies, and (e) disseminating lessons learned in the implementation and evaluation of the PD intervention regarding evidence-based practices in implementing comprehensive PL with fidelity in rural schools (pp. e33-e34).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found

Reader's Score: 10

5. (5) The likely utility of the products (such as information, materials processes, or techniques) that will result from the proposed project, including the potential for their being used effectively in a variety of other settings.

Strengths:

The applicant responded to the elements of the scoring criteria via a plan to improve the potential of the products (such as information, materials, processes, video testimonials) that will result from the proposed project being used effectively in a variety of other settings by making available to all schools as an Open Education Resource a digital guide that will (a) lead schools through steps to evaluate the alignment of their school policies and procedures with prosocial education, (b) provide recommendations for refining existing practices to enhance classroom and school climate, and (c) provide districts with tools to assess their current climate, identify areas for improvement, and

Sub

implement PL interventions to improve capacity of school staff to support students' prosocial behavior (pp. e34-e35).

Participating LEAs in the proposed intervention will be able to replicate in other schools the train-the-trainer model that will be developed and implemented in Year 5 of the proposed mid-phase EIR project in which certified school staff can serve as district-level trainers (pp. e34-e35).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found

Reader's Score: 5

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: 15

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.

Strengths:

The conceptual framework of the proposed project is grounded in theory and research indicating that (a) the presence of prosocial behavior is a stronger predictor of academic engagement and school achievement than the absence of negative behavior for all students, especially for underserved students, (b) school and classroom climate is a strong predictor of teacher retention. The proposed PL approach focuses on classroom climate as a lever to promote the desired student and teacher outcomes, including improved students' prosocial behaviors and academic engagement and achievement and increased teachers' use of prosocial education strategies and teacher retention (pp. e18-e23).

The logic model specifies the proposed project's core components, outputs, short-term, mid-term, and long-term impact and summarizes the theory of change by linking the desired student and teacher outcomes with the core components, including extensive professional development for school administrators, teachers, and teacher leaders to support the development, implementation with fidelity, and continuous improvement of the proposed PL intervention in project schools.

and the desired teacher outcomes of the proposed PL intervention, including teachers' increased implementation of prosocial strategies, improved school and classroom climate, and teacher retention (p. e147)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found

Reader's Score: 5

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

Sub

Strengths:

The applicant responded to the elements of the criteria by specifying clearly measurable objectives and outcomes to reach the main goals of the proposed project, including (a) to implement the PL intervention with fidelity in project schools, (b) to improve student outcomes (i.e., improving students' prosocial behaviors and reducing disciplinary incidents, improving students' perceptions of teacher-student relationships and school climate, and increasing students' academic engagement and achievement) and (c) to improve teacher outcomes (i.e., increasing teacher's use of prosocial education strategies and teachers' use of praise and induction, improving teacher's well-being and sense of self-efficacy, reducing teacher burnout, and increasing teacher retention) (pp. e35-e36).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found

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.**

Strengths:

The design of the proposed project is appropriate to address the needs of the target population, including underserved, disengaged, and misbehaving students because the proposed PL intervention focuses on improving educators' capacity to foster a positive classroom climate, improve teacher-student and student-student relationships via evidence-based and strength-based strategies, thereby supporting all students' prosocial behavior and academic engagement and achievement (pp. e21-e23, e36-e37).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found

Reader's Score: 5

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 without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).**

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Sub

Reader's Score:

2. (2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.

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.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

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

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: Implementers and Partners (up to 5 points)

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate how the project will be implemented by or in partnership with one or more of the following entities:

- (a) Community colleges (as defined in the NIA)
- (b) Historically Black colleges and universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (c) Tribal Colleges and Universities (as defined in the NIA)
- (d) Minority-serving institutions (as defined in the NIA)

Strengths:

The applicant did not apply for CPP1

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not apply for CPP1

Reader's Score: **0**

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/21/2023 05:47 PM

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

Reader #5: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	0
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	40	0
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	23
Sub Total	100	23
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Sub Total	5	0
Total	105	23

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - EIR Mid-phase - 2: 84.411B

Reader #5: *****

Applicant: The Curators of the University of Missouri Special Trust (S411B230031)

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 the following factors:

Reader's Score: 0

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.

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Strategy to Scale

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

Reader's Score: 0

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which the applicant identifies a specific strategy or strategies that address a particular barrier or barriers that prevented the applicant, in the past, from reaching the level of scale that is proposed in the application.

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Sub

Reader's Score: 0

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

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Reader's Score: 0

3. (3) The applicant's capacity (e.g., in terms of qualified personnel, financial resources, or management capacity) to bring the proposed project to scale on a national or regional level (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) working directly, or through partners, during the grant period.

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Reader's Score: 0

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

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Reader's Score: 0

5. (5) The likely utility of the products (such as information, materials processes, or techniques) that will result from the proposed project, including the potential for their being used effectively in a variety of other settings.

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Reader's Score: 0

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: 0

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.

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Reader's Score: 0

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

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Reader's Score: 0

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.

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Reader's Score: 0

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:

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 without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)).

Strengths:

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) is set to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the eMINTS professional development program, specifically focusing on the PAL Classrooms. This evaluation holds promise for meeting the Meets WWC Standards without Reservations criteria due to its robust design and execution. The study's primary emphasis on Grades 6–8 teachers and their students will allow for a targeted assessment of program impact. The adoption of a school-level blocked randomized control trial (RCT) design during project Years 3 and 4 is a strength of the proposed study. This design accounts for variables such as state, district (or geographic regions), and grades served, ensuring a balanced distribution across regions and grades (e40). AIR's plan to randomly assign 80 middle schools to either treatment or control groups, with the control group participating in PAL Classrooms 2.0 in Year 4, is well-conceived (e41).

The study's strength also lies in its meticulous approach to analytic methods and data analysis, encompassing both confirmatory and exploratory analyses. Additionally, the inclusion of multiple reliable measures aligns well with the program's theory of change. The addressing of potential joiners/movers/leavers is noteworthy, with intent-to-treat effects estimation planned for students and teachers at the time of random assignment (e41). The evaluation team's composition, consisting of AIR staff, is well-structured, and their two-part assessment plan demonstrates a clear progression. The initial phase (2023–2025) involving pilot teachers and administrators in 4 middle schools is an effective preparatory step. The subsequent efficacy phase (2025–2028) entails randomizing 80 middle schools for PAL Classrooms implementation, with control schools eventually adopting the program. The management of randomization, data collection, analysis, and reporting adheres to the U.S. Department of Education's criteria for independence, and the allocation of sufficient resources is reassuring.

Participants involved in the evaluation activities are comprehensive and encompass teachers, coaches, teacher-leaders, school administrators, and students in Grades 6–8 (e9).

Weaknesses:

While the evaluation's focus on Grades 6-8 is clear, the rationale for using school grade configuration within districts within states as a third blocking variable lacks clarity. It's essential to address whether there will be an adequate number of schools within all combinations of the three blocking variables, given that random assignment will occur at the school level (e30).

A notable concern is the use of conservative assumptions for attrition in the power analysis. The assumption that 70% of variation in the outcome will be explained by model covariates at the student and school levels could potentially lead to an overly optimistic estimate of the Minimum Detectable Effect Size (MDES). A more conservative R2 value could result in an MDES exceeding the 0.14 SD, as previously demonstrated in the unpublished RCT's impact on a state assessment which was reported in the proposal (e14).

The proposal's decision to standardize student achievement data within the analytic sample rather than using population norms raises questions. The plan to standardize end-of-year state assessment scaled scores within grade, subject, and state for scale comparability is valid, as per WWC standards (e24). However, it is notable that the WWC recommends standardization based on population distribution rather than the analytic sample.

Citing a comparison between video-based observations using the CLASS and live observations is crucial for design justification. The current absence of a reference for this claim undermines the substantiation of this design decision.

A key omission is the discussion of strategies to ensure a high and representative response for the student survey by addressing strategies to overcome anticipated barriers.

Sub

While English language learner status is included in requested demographics, the proposal lacks information about translating the survey for multiple languages, potentially excluding valuable participants from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Reader's Score: 11

2. (2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.

Strengths:

An impressive aspect of the evaluation is the incorporation of mixed methods for data collection and analyses in the implementation evaluation. This approach enhances the comprehensiveness of the study and enables a more nuanced understanding of the program's impact. Particularly noteworthy is the inclusion of a differential impact analysis, which will further enrich the analytic models developed for Research Questions 1 and 2 by introducing pertinent interaction terms (e44). This step is a substantial strength that will provide insights into potential variations in impact across different groups.

Weaknesses:

One notable weakness in the proposal is the lack of sufficient details concerning the planned cost analysis for review. The absence of information about the collection of essential ingredient data in the control group is concerning, as this data is crucial for estimating costs in comparison to the business-as-usual scenario. The incorporation of a robust cost analysis is vital for a comprehensive evaluation of the program's efficiency and economic viability. Furthermore, there is an oversight in explicitly identifying Qualitative and Cost Analyses within the specified research questions. These analyses should be clearly delineated to ensure a well-rounded evaluation that encompasses both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

Another shortcoming is the absence of a comprehensive plan to evaluate the conditions within the control group. An evaluation of the control group conditions is essential to gather valuable insights into the local context, which could be immensely relevant for future replication and scaling efforts. Understanding the outcomes and circumstances in the control group settings can provide critical information about the external factors influencing the program's impact and success.

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.

Strengths:

A strong point of the proposal lies in its clear measurable thresholds of program components. This is evident in Exhibit J1e, where specific details are provided. An illustrative example is seen in the Teacher Prosocial Strategies section, which offers a score and threshold for adequate implementation at the sample level (e184).

Weaknesses:

An area where the proposal could benefit from clarification pertains to the distinction between measures utilized as outcomes and those employed as indicators of implementation fidelity. There seems to be a potential overlap, as multiple measures appear to be utilized for both outcomes and fidelity assessment. It is crucial to clearly differentiate these roles to avoid confusion and ensure accurate interpretation of the evaluation results.

Sub

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

A strength of the proposal is the utilization of up to three focus groups and up to 20 interviews (e43) which offer a direct channel for receiving prompt feedback, and which holds potential for immediate program enhancements and suggestions for replication and scaling in other schools. This iterative feedback loop promotes ongoing improvement and ensures that the program remains aligned with the evolving needs of participants and the educational landscape.

The approach to data collection during both the pilot and randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluations demonstrates a commitment to robust assessment. The combination of administrative teacher records, student achievement and demographic data, teacher interviews, focus groups, and surveys enables a comprehensive evaluation of program implementation and perceptions. The inclusion of student surveys provides a means to evaluate self-perceptions, classroom dynamics, while also employing observations to measure the quality of student-teacher interactions and the effective implementation of program strategies (e9).

The active participation in monthly evaluation team meetings and the provision of annual process reports (e29) underscore a dedication to ongoing collaboration and transparency, fostering a robust evaluation process.

Weaknesses:

Description of the reporting feedback mechanisms is vague and no plans for how feedback will be used has been addressed.

The current description of these mechanisms is vague, leaving a gap in understanding how feedback will be collected, processed, and utilized. Clarification is needed to outline a clear process for how feedback from various sources will be captured, analyzed, and subsequently integrated into program improvement, implementation, and scalability.

Reader's Score: 4

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1:

Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners (up to 5 points)

Under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate how the project will be implemented by or in partnership with one or more of the following entities:

- (a) Community colleges (as defined in the NIA)**
- (b) Historically Black colleges and universities (as defined in the NIA)**
- (c) Tribal Colleges and Universities (as defined in the NIA)**
- (d) Minority-serving institutions (as defined in the NIA)**

Strengths:

Not required to score

Weaknesses:

Not required to score

Reader's Score: **0**

Status: Submitted

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