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

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)
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
Sub Total	70	70
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	5
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Workforce Diversity	2	1
Sub Total	7	6
Total	77	76

Technical Review Form

Panel #11 - EIR Early-Phase - 11: 84.411C

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

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)

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 factor:

Reader's Score: 20

> **Sub**
>
> 1. **(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 proposes a project that involves the development to existing strategies. For example: the applicant explains the need and potential benefits of integrating, extending delivery and expanding Trauma-Informed Practices (TIP) within Multi-Tiered Systems of Support MTSS in the target 5 high-need LEA systems. The applicant documents how trauma informed concepts research previously. For example: In Rahimi et al. (2021) study, educators' levels of experience, use of interventions, and other important trauma informed concepts were investigated. With participation from educators (n=414), the research denoted strong need to provide teachers resources and support trauma informed practices. Evidence from the study indicated multiple factors contributed to teachers' (95%) lack of knowledge of the signs of trauma, (98%) maltreatment and (93%) sexual abuse, and (98%) possess a limited understanding of child abuse laws and reporting procedures innovative approach, aligned to AP 1, AP 4 and CP 1, is three-fold, it will: (1) build upon best practices and strategies of the recent (2023) USDE Mental Health Service Professional (MHSP) Grant (entitled Region One Building Mental Health Leaders (RBMHL) housed in its Guidance, Counseling and Mental Health Division; (2) enhance the existing Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) and (3) develop, implement, and test promising new integrated evidence-based strategies. Project LIFT's! approach includes: tiers of support, I (Universal), II (Targeted) or III (Intensive), professional development and comprehensive training designed to increase 3,126 students' academic, social emotional and mental health outcomes in rural 5 LEAs, 10 secondary schools, influencing 242 educators (p. e20, 22).
>
>   **Weaknesses:**
>
>   no weakness 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 application applicant describes the project's conceptual framework underlying the proposed research and the quality of that framework. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support MTSS is a guiding framework for school and district leaders, as well as educators to remove academic, behavior and social-emotional barriers to learning. MTSS uses evidence-based practices to support the whole child along a tiered continuum and allows school personnel to make decisions for targeted and intensive intervention based on data. Region One Education Service Center is committed to supporting area school systems in their MTSS implementation efforts.

   The application applicant describes how the program will implement 3 interventions to reduce maladaptive behaviors and increasing academic learning for youths. The Logic Model (p. e158) emphasized Theory of Action as the conceptual framework that identifies key components and provides a synopsis to guide project staff. In fact, significant and proven results of the selected three key components of SEL, 31 Mental Health Counseling/ Advising Strategies (MH), 32 and Trauma Informed Practices (TIP) are summarized in the Logic Model to serve as: 1) a roadmap for the delivery of evidenced-based practices; 2) an overview of the fluid set of integrated effective services; and 3) an outline of the project with illustrated relationships among the proposed key project components and relevant outcomes.

   Weaknesses:

   no weakness 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 evaluation will apply systematic methodologies and research methods to measure the implementation, fidelity and outcomes of the program. Driven by the Logic Model Theory of Action, data will be collected to assess process measures and ensure ongoing monitoring of project implementation. For example, process data will describe the means by which activities, curricula, and services have been implemented according to the goal, objectives, outcomes, strategies, and proven practices. Implementation data will provide a basis for understanding program successes, local adaptation and fidelity of implementing the evidence-based programs. The evaluator will answer the following questions: What has been done? How was it done? How many times was it done? When was it done? To whom was it done? What factors led to the successful implementation and improvements of the project?

   Weaknesses:

   no weakness noted.

   Reader's Score: 5

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will**

successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs. (15 points)

Strengths:

The applicant describes the needs of the target population. The applicant asserts that there are a large number students with low scores/under achieving and many disciplinary violations in the schools. For example, in 2021-22, the STAAR scores for all target students (6th – 12th) illustrated an under-achievement with only 36% passing all subjects compared to the state at 48%. Students also struggled in Math 33% (state 38%), Reading/ELA 44% (state 52%), and Science 32% (state 50%). A contributing factor to low ratings is due to COVID -19 and the high behavioral and mental health issues it triggered, including the high number of disciplinary violations at schools. Based on: Texas Education Agency (TEA) data, students' disciplinary violations were at a high total of 1,599 (p. e20). For example: In May of 2022, two target school districts (Donna ISD and Rio Grande City CISD) arrested seven students for second-degree felony aggravated assault with a deadly weapon on school grounds. To ensure proven services were selected, the Kaplan & Norton's research-based "Strategy Linkage Model" is proposed by the applicant.

Weaknesses:

no weakness 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 the following factor:**

Reader's Score: 10

1. **(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 describes how the agency will encourage applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability . The applicant will use its existing extensive professional diversity network of agencies, organizations, educational institutions and media entities in outreach efforts through career databases (ZipRecruiter, HiringOpps, LinkedIn, Monster, etc.), publications, English/Spanish (diverse language) radio, newspapers, and television including local, regional, statewide and national universities and college job placement offices, Educational Service Centers (20 in the State of Texas) hiring platforms, community-based organizations, state entities, public schools, churches, etc., for effective outreach and recruitment of EIR Early Phase initiative personnel (p. e39). For example: the applicant will post personnel positions on the Diversity Job Board which is a network platform of job boards and employment websites consisting of, but not limited to, Military2Career, Women's Career Channel, iHispano, Black Career Network, Out Professional Network, Pro Able, etc. will address the needs with implementation of training, capacity building and support with follow-up to ensure fidelity of activities, strategies, and regular Advisory intervention.

Sub

The application clearly describes the personnel is qualified to administer the proposed project. The project administrator is highly educated with many years of management experience. For example: the Project Administrator is the Director of Guidance, Counseling and Mental Health Division of Leadership and Community Impact with over 17 years of extensive training, education, and management experience (5 yrs. required) of federal and state programs that include academic, social emotional initiatives, will supervise the Project Director and provide the overall leadership at 30% at no-cost. The Project Director's credentials include a Master's in Education Counseling and Guidance (Masters required), Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and is a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor. In addition, the Project Director is enrolled in a Doctorate Program.

The application describes the qualification of the research evaluation team. The project will employ EGT Institute Inc., (EGT) an educational research firm specializing in evaluation services, with over 25 years of experience in evaluating numerous similar USDE programs, will act as the external evaluator. EGT currently serves as Region One's evaluator and has broad knowledge of evaluation methodologies, quasi-experimental design QED and Random Control Trail RCT implementations. The Senior Evaluator, with an Ed.D. in educational Leadership and over 26 years of implementation, management and evaluation experience working with K-16 systems, will lead the evaluation efforts.

Weaknesses:

no weakness 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 adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 10

    Sub

1. **(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.**

   Strengths:

   To further maintain accountability and ensure high-quality products and services are delivered on time and within budget, the Project Director will utilize the Logic Model "Theory of Action" as a guide and will work closely with the Project LIFT! Advisory Council (PLAC), all staff, key partners, educators, and the evaluators to ensure full implementation and oversight of project activities. The application includes a timeline and logic model with all details clearly explained for when the activity is to occur and who is responsible to complete it. The budget appears reasonable and all items appear to be needed for the project.

   Weaknesses:

   no weakness noted.

   Reader's Score: 10

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 will partner with the University of Texas. The application includes a letter of support as a partnership with the University of Texas. For example: the University of Texas is a Hispanic-serving institutions (as defined in the NIA) (p. e71).

   Weaknesses:

   no weakness noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 2:**

   Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning (up to 2 points)

   Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, through adopting or expanding comprehensive, strategic career and compensation systems that provide competitive compensation and include opportunities for educators to serve as mentors and instructional coaches, or to take on additional leadership roles and responsibilities for which educators are compensated.

   Strengths:

   The applicant adequately describes how the project Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators. The application describes a plan to recruit a diverse group of teachers. The applicant will use its existing extensive professional diversity network of agencies, organizations, educational institutions and media entities in outreach efforts through career databases (ZipRecruiter, HiringOpps, LinkedIn, Monster, etc.), publications, English/Spanish (diverse language) radio, newspapers, and television including local, regional, statewide and national universities and college job placement offices, Educational Service Centers (20 in the State of Texas) hiring platforms, community-based organizations, state entities, public schools, churches, etc., for effective outreach and recruitment personnel. For example: the applicant will post personnel positions on the Diversity Job Board which is a network platform of job boards and employment websites consisting of, but not limited to, Military2Career, Women's Career Channel, iHispano, Black Career Network, Out Professional Network, Pro Able (p. e39).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly describe how the project will assist the poverty school districts' capacity to retain an effective and diverse educator workforce. In addition, the applicant does not discuss how the project will adopt or expand comprehensive strategic career and compensation systems that provide competitive compensation. In the application there is a lack of reference to compensation of teachers who participate in the project. Further, the applicant does not describe possible opportunities for educators to serve as mentors and instructional coaches, or to take on additional leadership roles and responsibilities for which educators are compensated.

Reader's Score: 1

Status:	Submitted
Last Updated:	09/10/2023 11:42 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)
Reader #2:   **********

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	19
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
Sub Total	70	69
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	5
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Workforce Diversity	2	1
Sub Total	7	6
Total	77	75

Technical Review Form

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

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)

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 factor:

Reader's Score: 19

Sub

1. **(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, Project Linking Innovation Fostering Transition (LIFT), is shown to be innovative in approach to working with high-needs and high-risk grade 6-12 students in five rural Texas local education districts (LEAs) (p. e12). The innovativeness is noted for the project's design in interconnecting social emotional learning (SEL) support in a new way for the youth with their academic learning and student achievement (p. e14). The project also is innovative in how it will address the school counseling shortage with increasing the capacity of its existing teachers and providing them with training in implementing a multi-tiered system of student supports (MTTS), mental health advising, external telehealth (Betterhelp) for students' mental health care with professionally licensed mental health clinicians; SEL teacher toolkit for proven therapeutic strategies and pedagogy (sensorimotor redirection); and Character Strong SEL supports (pp. e23, e32-e33). Specifics clearly point to this proposed project building upon the best practices in promoting positive mental health and academic achievement in youth and providing the teachers effective tools to accomplish this.

The teacher-led advisory component, even though it is not totally new, is an innovative approach since it is going to contain specific mental health and SEL training for the teachers and learning of those concepts by the youth (p. e26).

The applicant's proposed project is well-explained in that it will serve high-need students who are in high poverty 88% (of the five LEAs' students are economically disadvantaged); children/youth of diverse ethnicities/races (98% Hispanic); 26% English Language Learners; 13% are students with disabilities; 30% of students in 2022 had been involved in physical fights at school; and 25% of the students in 2022 in the target schools had felt sad or depressed (pp. e20-e21).

Weaknesses:

There is a lack of clarity of how the proposed new project will build upon the strategies that are part of the recently awarded 2023 Mental Health Service Professional Grant (p. e22). It is not clear what strategies and goals are included into this Mental Health Service Professional Grant, so it cannot be clearly ascertained if this EIR project will actually build upon effective mental health strategies in operation in the LEAs or only replicate existing features.

Sub

Reader's Score: 19

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's proposed project is well-grounded in effective research for effective practices in SEL learning by youth, i.e., Denham/s research in embedding SEL and other mental health supports into an overall multi-tiered student support framework that leads to greater personal, interpersonal, and academic outcomes (p. e26). The project's activities have been well-informed through best practices in the mental health and educational research community, which lends credence to this project being based on a strong conceptual framework, i.e., mental health counseling/advising strategies best practice research by Bos, J.M., Dhillon, S, Borman, T. (2019). American Institutes for Research and SEL best practices form research of Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (pp. e26, e380).

   The applicant includes a clear and well-developed logic model provides a pattern, alignment, and connection to the project's objectives and goals. The logic model shows the innovative alignment of the project's inputs (gaps and weaknesses in the targeted communities and their schools); outputs of services in SEL; teacher training; Character Strong curriculum; students' advising/counseling by both trained mental health counselors and also teachers; and infusion of trauma-informed practices for teacher training. Specificity is noted for the detailed project outcomes which include impacting over 3,000 students with this project which is a significant number (pp. e30, e158).

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses found.

   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:

   One clear and specific project goal is presented by the applicant, and it provides clear direction of what the applicant will accomplish in this project, i.e., implement evidence based MTSS in a culturally responsive climate that improves students' relationships, behaviors, SEL, and academic success (p. e35).

   Two measurable, relevant, time-bound, and achievable objectives are presented, and they align to the project goals and also have several clear and attainable measurable outcomes, including ones for the GPRA Performance Measures (p. e35). For example, a well-aligned objective is Objective 2 which involves improving the behavior, relationships, engagement, SEL and academic success for all high-need students (minority, at-risk, English Language Learners, low-income, and students with special needs (p. e36).

Sub

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. (15 points)**

Strengths:

The design of the overall project implementation is well-formulated to meet the needs of the schools, students, families, teachers, as they have identified an effective research-based Strategy Linkage Model (Kaplan & Norton's model) (p. e37)

With the needs of students to have their negative behaviors and depression prevented and deescalated, this project has the elements to provide a well-rounded approach to delivering those services through both in-house educators but also through professional mental health clinicians (p. e38). The teacher-led advisory sessions are the binding factor between the increase in positive mental health of the students and activities to promote greater student academic achievements (p. e38).

The approach of providing teachers the opportunity to advance their careers into student mental health counseling with a district-financial and time support enhances the whole project and will meet the needs of both the current teachers but also the students who will gain more in-house skilled staff to counsel them (p. e34).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

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 the following factor:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub

1. **(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 proposed quality strategies that include various methods of reaching out to individuals who are representative of the underrepresented populations in this project, such as individuals from rural, isolated, and distressed communities and fully utilizing the applicant's network with agencies, organizations. An excellent array of job sites and connections demonstrate the wide reach in gaining quality applicants from underrepresented populations, including Diversity Job Board, Military2Career, Women's Career Channel, iHispano, Black Career

Network, Pro Able, higher educational institutions' placement services, LinkedIn, HiringOpps, local and regional television stations, all 20 Texas Education Service Centers, public schools, and local churches (p. e39).

The project's key personnel of project administrator (project lead with in-kind .30 full-time equivalency), project director (1 FTE), and school-based mental health clinicians (4 total FTEs) all have high quality education, training in project-relevant fields, and quality career experiences to best serve in their capacities in this project or have job descriptions for the vacant positions that require high quality in education and career experiences. An example is seen for the high quality job description of project director. This description indicates high level of expectations of the individual having at least a Master's degree in Education and Administration or Master's degree in Education Counseling and Guidance; being licensed as a Professional Counselor or as a Texas licensed Principal or related certification; and having three plus years of experience in managing federal programs, working with mental health, social, emotional and academic programs in a schools setting; having five plus years' experience in supervising school grants and federal grants (preferred); and having a proven record of ongoing personnel professional development (p. e40).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

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 adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 10

1. **(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.**

    Strengths:

    The applicant presents a quality management plan which demonstrates that it has the project staff, their defined responsibilities, project timeline for the entire five grant years, and milestones that are tied to project objectives which will ensure the project remains on task, within budget, and tasks are performed in a logical manner and on time.

    A clear, concise, and logical project management plan is provided with alignment to the project objectives, and inclusion of milestone tasks; calendar periods of implementation for each task; expected measures for project outcomes; and project personnel responsible for each milestone completion (pp. e44-e45). An example of such a clear and complete management plan element is the milestone of "Implement family and school engagement strategies to commence in April-May 2024 and be ongoing" throughout the five grant years. Clarity is noted for accompanying outcome measurement tools of meeting agendas, roster of attendance of families, and surveys collected from participants with oversight of project personnel of mental health clinicians, project partners, local educational agencies (e.g., Zapata County Independent School District and Monte Alto Independent School District) (pp. e14, e44).

Sub

Fiscal accountability for this project's grant funds and project expenditures is fully designed for fiscal integrity, i.e., Project Director working with the Region One's finance department and the Project LIFT Advisory Council to meet monthly to review actual expenditures against proposed allowable costs, milestones, budgeted resources, and if needed, implementing fiscal revisions for the project (pp. e42-e43).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 10

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 clearly demonstrates that it will be partnering with a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), the University of Texas at Austin (p. e15). The University of Austin is well-described for its benefits that it will bring to PK-12 underrepresented student groups in this project, such as providing the classroom teachers professional development and coaching in multi-tiered systems of support, strategies, and activities to improve school/classroom climates, improve relationships, improve social-emotional learning, and improve academic success for students (pp. e427-e428). Specifically, the Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health at the University of Texas at Austin will provide teacher/educator training on mental health topics, including crisis response, mental health first aid, trauma-informed school practices, school mental health screening, motivational interviewing, and the Check and Connect program (p. e127).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 5

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 2:**

Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student

Learning
(up to 2 points)

Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, through adopting or expanding comprehensive, strategic career and compensation systems that provide competitive compensation and include opportunities for educators to serve as mentors and instructional coaches, or to take on additional leadership roles and responsibilities for which educators are compensated.

Strengths:

Specificity and value are noted for the plethora of professional development opportunities that will be offered to teachers via this project as they promote both academic achievement and mental health for their students. The opportunities are viable and will certainly benefit the schools, parents, students, and the teachers resolve the issues of youth having elevated mental health needs, low academic achievement in isolated rural areas, and the need for many more mental health counselors, school counselors and mental health specialists. An example of such strategic career building opportunities for the teachers includes the partnering with the Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health at the University of Texas at Austin (MSI-UT) to give school release time/tuition (compensation) to teachers to attend master's degree classes and be trained and coached in becoming behavioral clinicians and/school counselors which will retain effective educators in the district in student-serving capacities (p. e34).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not discuss if/to what extent its current educator staff is diverse to demonstrate that its plan is to provide diverse educators in the LEAs to receive the opportunities to receive compensation (tuition) and time-away from educators' duties to participate in the master's degree in counseling program and expand their leadership roles and strategic careers (p. e34).

Reader's Score: 1

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/08/2023 09:35 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)
Reader #3:   **********

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	18
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	30
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	8
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Sub Total	70	66
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	5
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Workforce Diversity	2	0
Sub Total	7	5
Total	77	71

Technical Review Form

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

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)

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 factor:

Reader's Score: **18**

    Sub

1. **(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 proposes to provide a well-thought out set of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) via social emotional learning (SEL) and mental health counseling and advising, as well as support trauma-informed practice and capacity building for educators in a rural, hard-to-serve region of Texas. The proposed work builds on the strategies developed utilizing a grant the organization implemented on mental health, as well as enhancing existing MTSS structures and creating new strategies.

    Weaknesses:

    The applicant does not explicitly describe which of the strategies that are being implemented are actually new. Although the applicant makes reference to "new strategies," they are never explicitly named or explained, making it hard to fully evaluate the extent to which the proposed strategies are new.

    Reader's Score: **18**

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 lays out a sound logic model that underpins the well-thought-out conceptual framework for the proposed project (e158). In response to a set of identified weaknesses, the project proposes to implement an evidence-based SEL curriculum, an evidence-based teacher-led advisory training and MTSS implementation support, and trauma-informed practices capacity building (e158). Each of these approaches are rooted in a research base and together form a solid plan to address the mental health and social emotional needs of the target population.

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 lays out one strong overarching goal around the implementation of their MTSS structures, and two aligned and clear objectives, as well as a set of outcomes that will be used to measure the objectives. For example, the second objective is to "improve the behavior, relationships, engagement, social, emotional, and academic success of all students," and the applicant lists several specific and measurable outcomes that will help determine if that objective has been met. Such outcomes include a decrease in the percentage of schools that report fewer suspensions and expulsions by 8% and an increase in the academic achievement on the state standardized assessment by 7% (e36).

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 conducted a thorough needs assessment process in order to identify the specific gaps and weaknesses in services and infrastructure in its target LEAs. The gaps identified include, but are not limited to: high mental health needs, low academic scores, COVID-related learning loss, and limited access to PD for educators (e158). The applicant addresses these needs by proposing to implement a comprehensive MTSS framework that includes an SEL component, a mental health component, and trauma-informed practices.

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 the following factor:**

Reader's Score: 8

   Sub

1. **(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 has a comprehensive plan to recruiting and encouraging applicants from members of groups who have been traditionally underrepresented, including a specific focus on members of rural, isolated, and distressed communities, as well as specific and targeted outreach efforts that focus in institutions like minority-serving institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, and churches (e39). Additionally, the applicant plans to post relevant jobs on the "Diversity Job Board," to further encourage a diverse array of applicants (e39).

   The applicant also lists a highly qualified administrator to support the project (e40). This administrator brings 17 years of experience and management of state and federal programs and will supervise the project director.

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant only lists one qualified current staff member who is staffed to this project, with the remaining personnel needing to be hired (e40). And although they include three resumes in the appendix, they do not detail what role two of the three individuals will play in the project. The lack of a robust set of existing highly qualified personnel (beyond the single administrator) responsible for this project represents a significant weakness in the overall quality of the project personnel.

      Reader's Score: 8

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the adequacy of resources and quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 10

   Sub

1. **(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.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant has a tight system in place for both program and fiscal monitoring of the proposed project (e43). Additionally, the applicant describes a set of regular reports and meetings that provide oversight over the project, such as the monthly reports provided to the Project Director on progress toward outcomes (e42), and the monthly meetings between the Director and the finance department to review expenses (e43). Additionally, the applicant includes a set of milestones, with each milestone attached to a specific time period, a personnel owner, and an

Sub

outcome against which it should be measured (e44). For example, the applicant plans to set up the evaluation data base in February and March of 2024, overseen by the ED and PD with a clear outcome of having a database operational (e44).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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 proposes to partner with a minority-serving institution: The University of Texas at Austin (e15). The proposed partner includes a letter of support in the application, describing the nature of the collaboration, with a pledge to support the target schools with the implementation of their MTSS structures (e127). Additionally, the applicant describes the technical assistance provided by the University and various professional development modules University staff will deliver (e428).

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 2:**

   Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning (up to 2 points)

   Projects that are designed to increase the proportion of well-prepared, diverse, and effective educators serving students, with a focus on underserved students, through building or expanding high-poverty school districts' capacity to hire, support, and retain an effective and diverse educator workforce, through adopting or expanding comprehensive, strategic career and compensation systems that provide competitive compensation and include opportunities for educators to serve as mentors and instructional coaches, or to take on additional

leadership roles and responsibilities for which educators are compensated.

Strengths:

The applicant did not address this competitive priority.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not address this competitive priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/08/2023 12:25 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)
Reader #1: **********

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	10
Sub Total	30	10
Total	30	10

Technical Review Form

Panel #8 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 8: 84.411C

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

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)

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: 10

    Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice). (20 points)**

   Strengths:

   The applicant identifies a large number of student and teacher outcomes that may have the potential to meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards with or without reservations if further described. For example, potential outcomes include administrative data such as student assessment scores and disciplinary outcomes (e46) and both outcomes are deemed to be valid and reliable if certain conditions are met. Several statistical analysis methods are mentioned as being a part of the evaluation study, including analysis of variance (e47), and these methods would be allowable under WWC guidelines if further described. In addition, the applicant identifies an external evaluator with noted experience in conducting project evaluations as their independent evaluator (e45).

   Weaknesses:

   The applicant does not present a clearly written evaluation design that clearly specifies the intent to use a quasi-experimental design (QED) or a randomized controlled trial. In many cases, the applicant refers to a QED (for example, e47) but then the applicant also states that students will be randomly selected (e47). In either case, the applicant does not provide an adequate description of the student sample to ensure an internally valid design, nor do they justify that the sample size is sufficient to detect at least a small effect size difference. Within the context of a possible QED, the applicant does not describe how each group will be formed and how baseline equivalence will be checked and addressed, if needed. It is not clear which of the many outcomes discussed will be a focus of the effectiveness evaluation, since the applicant does not clearly identify the research questions that will be a focus of the effectiveness study (e45-e47). In addition, the applicant does not clearly specify the statistical analyses they plan to use, including how missing data will be handled in the analyses. Overall, the applicant presents a fair discussion of the evaluation methods and how they would produce evidence of the project's effectiveness that would meet WWC standards with or without reservations.

   Reader's Score: 5

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:

The applicant describes plans for a formative evaluation that are good and likely to provide performance feedback and permit the periodic assessment of progress toward achieving the intended outcomes (e45-e49). The primary purpose of the formative evaluation will be to examine progress being made toward meeting the specified performance measures which presents a clear alignment. For example, the evaluator will report on the extent to which the treatment services have been implemented according to the project goals and objectives (e45). The external evaluator will meet with the project team to share results of these data collections at least monthly, which allows for a formal schedule for providing feedback (e49). Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected as a part of these efforts, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and administrative student data.

Weaknesses:

The applicant intends to collect and report on many measures, including qualitative and quantitative data indicators. However, the applicant does not demonstrate that these data will be analyzed in a proper mixed-methods framework to ensure valid interpretations. In addition, the applicant does not consistently identify the research questions that will be a target of each type of evaluation (that is, formative versus summative evaluations). This lack of clarity in the methods is a weakness.

Reader's Score: 3

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 identifies the key project inputs, outputs, implementation outcomes, teacher, and student outcomes in their logic model (e158). The evaluation plan includes data collections that are designed to report on each of these components as a part of the formative and summative evaluations (e46-e47). As such, the applicant demonstrates that the evaluation will report on the key project outcomes identified in the logic model.

Weaknesses:

The association between the logic model components is not clearly identified to allow for an understanding of how the outputs are intended to lead to specific outcomes. Specifically of concern is that the applicant does not identify any potential mediators in their logic model, or in their evaluation analysis plans. In addition, the applicant does not identify measurable thresholds for acceptable implementation. Therefore, it is unclear how the applicant will assess fidelity of implementation, and whether this metric is a mediator of project outcomes.

Reader's Score: 2

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/28/2023 10:47 AM

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/29/2023 09:17 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)
Reader #2: **********

	Points Possible	**Points Scored**
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	10
Sub Total	30	10
Total	30	10

Technical Review Form

Panel #8 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 8: 84.411C

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

Applicant: Region One Education Service Center (S411C230008)

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: 10

    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 project will collect pre- and post-test data (e46) from 1000 students across 5 districts and 10 secondary schools. The proposed work seems to use either a quasi-experimental design (QED) or randomized controlled trial (RCT), both of which would broadly be acceptable for meeting the WWC standards with or without reservations. The application notes that the evaluation team will determine if students have like characteristics and similar baseline characteristics, Nonetheless, additional concerns with the evaluation design and plan temper the confidence with which the proposed work would meet WWC standards with or without reservations.

    Weaknesses:

    The application is confusing as to whether the research design is a QED or RCT. This is because in one place the text states that the research design is a QED (e47) but in other places the application indicates that students will be randomly selected and assigned to treatment and control groups (e27, e47). Similarly, the application is confusing as to how many students will be served because it notes that 1000 students will be assigned to treatment and control groups but that this will continue until all students are served over 5 years (e35). If the research design is a RCT, then the application should address how the evaluation team will minimize or deal with attrition including the missing data that may arise from attrition (e.g., maximum likelihood estimation, regression imputation). In addition, the application seems to incorrectly discuss missing data in terms of baseline data to be collected rather than data that is missing because of issues like attrition (e44, e438). Though the application indicates that the evaluation team will determine if students have similar baseline characteristics, the text is not clear about and provides few details on how that will be done, tested for, and what characteristics will be considered other than to examine changes within experimental and control groups (e47). The analytic plan also involves rather simplistic analyses (e.g., t-tests, ANOVA, correlation; e47) and these do not analytically account for pre-existing differences or changes within experimental and control groups that may be evident. Accounting for pre-existing differences seems especially important as the application notes that the study will involve non-equivalent experimental and control groups (e47). While the application discusses the importance of using reliable and valid measures (e32) and it may achieve this by using some established measures (e.g., Beck Depression Inventory), the text largely does not discuss the reliability and validity of key measures.

Sub

While the application has merit in terms of the evaluation, the lack of clarity in several aspects of the research design may prevent the work from meeting WWC standards.

Reader's Score: 5

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 evaluation team will provide the project evaluation data monthly (e43, e49). The evaluation data seem to be comprehensive and relevant to the project (e46). For example, the evaluation data will include interviews, focus groups, and surveys of students and educators, mental health practitioners, school leaders, parents, and partners; student attendance, disciplinary incidents, academic, and behavioral assessment data; and student participation in school based SEL and mental health services.

Weaknesses:

Some of the process data will be shared less frequently and variably, with some being shared quarterly, biannually, and annually (e50, e51). This variable schedule could make it difficult to have a thorough understanding of progress because of different pieces of information being obtained at different points in time. The application provides few details as to how the seemingly large amount of quantitative and qualitative data that will be collected and will be analyzed in a timely manner to provide regular assessment of progress.

While the evaluation will be comprehensive, the lack of clarity about timelines and analytic procedures for using all the data in a timely fashion makes it unlikely that the evaluation methods will provide comprehensive and actionable information towards progress of achieving intended outcomes.

Reader's Score: 3

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

Strengths:

The application articulates several key components such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Mental Health Counseling/Advising strategies, and Trauma-informed Practices (e47). The application also clearly outlines several student outcomes (social emotional learning, behavior, and academic performance; e47) as well as educator outcomes (e.g., increased educator knowledge, competencies, and skills development; e47).

Weaknesses:

The application does not clearly outline mediators or measurable thresholds for acceptable implementation.

Some key aspects of the underlying logic model are clearly outlined but there is a lack of clarity on other dimensions, especially mediators and measurable thresholds. This unclear and incomplete logic model that will guide the evaluation may hinder how informative the results of the evaluation are for understanding the components, how the components function, and for achieving acceptable implementation.

Reader's Score: 2

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/29/2023 09:17 AM