

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/13/2023 08:56 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	22
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	8
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	7
Sub Total	70	57
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Workforce Diversity	2	0
Sub Total	7	0
Total	77	57

Technical Review Form

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

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

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 application includes a general overview of the proposed project. The application implies the project involves the demonstration of strategies that are being built upon. The project intends to implement the SSIS CIP curriculum in various K-12 settings which has resulted in significant positive effects of the SSIS CIP curriculum on SEL skills, achievement, and mental health outcomes based on randomized control trials (p. e16, 21).

The application explains the project is innovative and novel as the project infuses technology into a Social Emotional Learning program. The project will assist teachers presently implementing a Social Emotional Learning curriculum. For example: technology will allow teachers to observe chats between students, block information quickly, and provide feedback immediately using a technological platform (p. e19).

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: 22

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 application adequately explains how the frameworks of the project relates to the CASEL competency framework and the theories of action (logic model). The primary conceptual framework underlying the effort to teaching students important SEL skills is the CASEL competency framework. The CASEL framework has become the dominant competency framework from both research (Durlak et al., 2015) and policy perspectives in informing state SEL standards and SEL practice (Frye et al., 2021). The framework is based on three meta-analyses (Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak, et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2017) and lessons learned in implementing SEL programs in schools (Durlak et al., 2015; Weissberg, 2019). For example: the lessons are a subset of SSIS CIP SEL (Elliott & Gresham, 2007, 2020) as the construct is based on an alignment study to the CASEL framework (Borowski, 2019). The framework also outlines district and school theories of action. For example: the project intends to strengthen adult SEL competencies, promote SEL for students, and practicing continuous improvement which entails building a foundational support.

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 application includes a logic model where some goals, objectives and outcomes are measurable. The applicant includes some measurable outcomes such as teacher's professional development. For example: one of the projects outcomes is that 80 teachers will complete workshops (p e31).

Weaknesses:

All of the outcomes are not described with great details or some are missing an explanation. For example: goal #2 to Develop PD support with preprogram training, ongoing technical assistance via consultation or coaching does not include a clear description of the number of trainings. For example: the application does not clearly describe the number of professional development trainings that will be offered or the number of trainings the 80 teachers need to complete (p. e30).

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. (15 points)

Strengths:

The applicant describes the general condition of the schools in the state of Michigan. The target population has significant educational needs and is at risk for educational difficulties (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021) (p. e32). Many of the target schools and students within those target schools can be classified as high need with respect to poverty, teacher shortages, and graduation rates. For example, in the North Ed school approximately half of 4th and 8th graders were eligible for the National School Lunch Program, a poverty indicator, and of these, 36% and 48% scored below Basic on NAEP Mathematics, and 49% and 39% below Basic on NAEP Reading, respectively (MI School Data, 2021) (p e33). Teacher shortages are a present and growing problem in the two districts targeted for this study: 80% of superintendents reported that teacher recruitment and retention is very or extremely difficult for their districts (Arsen et al., 2021) (p. e33). Many rural districts are underfunded, often significantly (Strange, 2011). Rural students do not go to college at the same rates and urban and suburban students (Koricich et al., 2018) and

Sub

the gap between rural and urban higher education participation is growing (Marré, 2017) (p. e33).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly define how the design of the proposed project is appropriate to and will successfully address the specific needs of the target population or other identified needs at the ten schools chosen for the project (p. 16, 18, 30, 32, 33, 41). The application does not explain the how the project has considered the needs of the targeted population for this project. For example: the applicant does not describe the present program in place or the lack of a Social Emotional Learning program at the school.

Reader's Score: 9

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 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. The project staff is diverse in gender (approximately a 50-50 balance), race/ethnicity (Co-PI is African American), and national origin (co-PI Hao, co-Investigators, and Project Manager were born outside the U.S.) (p. e35). There are several key positions that will not be filled until the grant is awarded. For example: these include positions involved in pilot and main study data collection in the schools, and analysis and reporting positions. The applicant will engage in a recruitment strategy to encourage applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, and national origin. For example: the agency will work with the Michigan Works employment agency in Traverse City, and with two, large, area community colleges, Northwestern Michigan College, and Spring Arbor University, both of which have large programs in education and social work (p. e36).

The application describes in great detail that the key personnel is qualified with experience and education. The application includes resumes as documentation for key personnel education and work qualifications. For example: The Project Investigator PI has experience in managing large scale data collection efforts, particularly for the Army Research Institute and will oversee the project as well as provide social and emotional learning expertise to all aspects of the effort including design work, analyses, and report writing (p e34). The CoProject Investigator Co-PI holds a doctorate degree and will work on any design changes associated with the ETS Platform for Collaborative Assessment & Learning as well as provide support in its use. The other Co-PI is a learning scientist and an internationally recognized expert on collaborative learning, has an extensive publication record related to learning and collaborative assessment, and has served and is serving as a PI on several NSF and IES grants on collaborative learning and assessment (p e35).

Sub

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly describe a plan to encourage applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based gender, age, or disability. The applicant does not address how the agency will encourage underrepresented individuals to apply for vacant positions. The applicant does not describe a plan in great detail to fill the positions and does not clearly explain all roles and responsibilities of the key positions. For example: the application does not include job descriptions (p. e91).

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: 7

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 includes a general overview describing the management plan that includes a basic budget, a brief timeline with vague activities, and goals to complete the project. The applicant includes a plan that the agency may complete the project in a timely manner (p. e30).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not include a clear explanation of responsibilities. In addition to the key personnel there is a list of other personnel for the project with no role, responsibility and job description. For example: the application budget includes a Research Project Manager, Sr. Measurement Scientist, Assessment Specialists (IT Director, Technology Manager, principal Lead Software Developer, Lead Software Designer(s), Software Usability Specialist, Data Analyst, Editor, Senior Designer, Research Associates, and a Secretarial/Clerical with no job description (p. e90). The applicant's budget is not clearly explained with detailed amounts. The budget does not explain how amounts and figures have been calculated. The budget utilizes an average rate for an individual's salary grade level for confidentiality purposes and an adjustment reflecting 2,080 hours per year to arrive at an hourly rate. For example: the budget includes an expense for the salary of the Research Project Manager 1.96 / 16% and no specified dollar amount for the expense (p. e30, 31).

The timeline is not detailed with specific activities needed to complete the project. For example: goal #1 (1.2) Cog lab interview developed for student and teachers will be conducted; however there is no information in quarter one describing an activity where participating teachers will be selected for the program.

Reader's Score: 7

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 application applicant does not address the priority.

Weaknesses:

No weakness noted.

Reader's Score: 0

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 application applicant does not address the priority.

Weaknesses:

No weakness noted.

Reader's Score: 0

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	22
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	8
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	6
Sub Total	70	56
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Workforce Diversity	2	0
Sub Total	7	0
Total	77	56

Technical Review Form

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

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

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:

This proposed project is an innovative and novel approach to deliver social emotional learning infused in a technology program. The project is well-detailed to be an enhanced version of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Social Skills Improvement System Classwide Intervention Program (SSIS CIP) with its innovative, technology-imparted approach to provide evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) skills programming to middle-grade, high needs students while also increasing those students' academic performance (p. e19). Strong evidence is shown that this proposed project will be built upon and will be an alternative to the effective SEL strategies in the SSIS CIP which has been studied in a prior randomized controlled trial (DiPerna et al., 2018; DiPerna et al., 2015) which demonstrated this SSIS CIP increased students' SEL skills, decreased students' problem behaviors, and improved academic engagement and achievement (p. e21).

The import of this new SEL program, development, and use of the ETS Platform for Collaborative Assessment Learning (EPCAL) design is significant for use with a large number (this project's target population of 400 students in grades five and six) of elementary and middle school age students as practice for skill acquisition of social-emotional skills sets; in providing immediate age-appropriate automated monitoring and intelligence facilitated feedback to students, with features of an online dashboard permitting teachers to "listen in" on "group" discussion sessions while students remain engaged in the new learning. In addition, this proposed SEL program will clearly provide valuable time management in the classroom for teachers while students are engaged in learning and being given instant feedback on their SEL choices in the role playing (pp. e24, e38, e45-e26).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 22

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:

This project is well-grounded in research for effective practices in SEL learning for youth and for interconnected strategies for increased academic achievement i.e., three meta-analyses (Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak, et al., 2010; Taylor, et al., 2017) and lessons learned implementing effective SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2015 and Weissberg, 2019) (p. e27). The development and utilization of the innovative feature of this project, the EPCAL, is fully described to have an underlying research base that shows efficacy in students' skill practice opportunities as compared to a standard delivery system because the students will be discussing those newly learned skills with a small group of students, role playing those skills, and engaging in additional practice opportunities to respond to SEL situations (p. e28). The research foundation for this innovation is from Koedinger et al, 2023, in which the researchers found that increased practice opportunities of skills directly relate to increases in skill mastery (p. e28). A convincing discussion is also presented for the advantages of a technology-based format for delivering this SEL instruction with the benefits to include a more positive classroom management and greater capacity to response to multiple students instantly to student questions and more positively produce significant student outcomes (p. e28).

Furthermore, this foundational SSIS CIP social-emotional skills program has been recognized as a Tier I Strong Program by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) and also has been designated as a Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional learning (CASEL) SElect program (pp. e21, e27).

A clear and well-developed logic model provides a pattern, alignment, and connection to the project's goals. The logic model shows the innovative alignment of the project's resources (including resources of the participating 5th and 6th grade teachers); activities (including developing the full EPCAL intervention); outputs; proximal-, medial-, and distal- outcomes (including increases in student achievement and students' increases in SEL and positive behaviors) (p. e79).

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:

Four clear and specific project goals are presented, and they provide clear direction of what the applicant will accomplish in this project, i.e., Goal 1: "develop intervention to increase students' SEL, Academic Achievement, and Engagement" (p. e30).

Some 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 EIR Early Phase Performance Measures (p. e35 and Notice Inviting Applications, pp. 33135-33136). A well-aligned objective is Objective 2 which involves improving the behavior, relationships, engagement, SEL and academic success for all

Sub

high-need students (minority, at-risk, English Language Learners, low-income, and students with special needs (p. e36).

The provided project outcomes include both the applicant's developed outcomes plus the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Performance Measure targets, such as providing the enhanced project to high-need students and also tracking for outcomes for the implementation of a project evaluation that provides information about the key project elements and the approach of the project to facilitate testing, development, or replication in other settings (pp. e31, e39-e40).

Weaknesses:

Some of the project objectives are not timebound, measurable, or specific to provide clear direction of this project, i. e., lack of measurability, being time-bound, and being more specific in project objective 5: "report on findings" and objective 6: "develop preprogram teacher training" (p. e30). Having specific, measurable, well-timed, and realistic project objectives will better guide the project towards achieving its expected outcomes (pp. e30-e31).

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. (15 points)

Strengths:

The applicant provides a convincing explanation of how it selected its target students and teachers for this project and how their project design will best meet their identified needs. Fifth and sixth grade students were selected due to the appropriateness of the content material in the SEL programming, the greater likelihood of their communicating effectively (chatting and texting online) in the electronic format due to their upper elementary grade levels, and due to research evidence that these upper grade levels in elementary/middle schools are at risk for educational difficulties (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021) (p. e32).

The applicant demonstrates that it has conducted some needs assessment of the of the students in the selected targeted schools and identified the targeted schools and its students for being high-need, i.e., poverty-stricken, low academic scoring (36%-48% scoring below basic on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Mathematics and between 39%-49% below on the NAEP Reading (MISchoolData, 2021) (p. e33). Needs of the educators were also identified. Their need for higher levels of retention in the teaching profession/school will be met with the addition of the SEL student lessons being evidence-based and being delivered in an engaging and teacher-friendly manner, without extraordinary teacher preparation for those lessons (p. e33).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly demonstrate that it conducted any type of needs assessment for the targeted schools/students specifically being deficient in social-emotional learning or behaviors that were heightened due to lack of SEL skills. These types of baseline data will be important to adequately show how this project will be meeting those emotional and social needs of the fifth and sixth grade students (pp. e32-e33, e41).

Reader's Score: 9

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 proposes to conduct some project personnel recruitment and reach out to individuals who are representative of the underrepresented populations (p. e36).

The project's key personnel of principal investigator, (.14 full-time equivalency (FTE)) six co-principal investigators varying from .10%-.14 FTEs), and research project manager (.16 FTE) 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 level of project-relevant education and career experiences of the principal investigator. This individual has attained a quality Ph.D. degree from Stanford University and has career experiences in managing large scale data collection efforts, particularly for the Army Research Institute and also for social emotional learning research project including the Intelligence Advanced Research Project Activity and a socio-economic status project for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) National Assessment of Education Progress (NAAEP) in 2006-2020 (pp. e34, e51).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly describe how the entities it plans to work with in encouraging applications for project jobs are institutions/agencies that promote traditionally underrepresented populations, i.e., Michigan Works employment agency, Northwestern Michigan College, and Spring Arbor University (p. e36).

The applicant does not present a job description nor complete details of duties for the project position of the research project manager (pp. e34-e36, e90). Without specificity of the expected educational and career experiences for this project position, it is not evident that this position of research project manager will have the expertise and project-related education to best lead necessary project tasks and adequately supervise other personnel in this project (p. e91).

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: 6

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 presents some clear elements of a quality management plan for the four-year project and demonstrates that its key project positions of principal investigator and several co-principal investigators will successfully execute their project roles (pp. e30-e31). An example of the clarity of the project roles for the principal investigator is noted, including the responsibilities of overseeing the project's design phases, analyses, report writing and also providing his expertise in social-emotional learning to influence an effective social-emotional tool which is at the center of this project effort (pp. e79, e90).

Project milestones are concretely detailed, aligned to project goals, and logically connected to a timeline with quarterly and yearly designations, such as the pilot schools for this project being recruited in the project year 1, quarter four with oversight by one of the co-principal investigators (J.A.T.) (pp. e30, e35).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not fully detail the responsibilities of the research project manager, i.e., lacking specificity for what the position will be doing to keep the project "on track" (p. e90). It is essential to understand the expected duties of the project manager who will be assigned some functions of keeping the project on track for implementation within the four years.

Details are not well-presented for the oversight of the fiscal accountability of this project, such as assigned personnel to adequately manage the grant funds and expenditures, practice proper accounting measures to keep this project within its budget and properly account for all federal grant and non-federal grant funds (pp. e30-e31, e34-e36, e90). It is important to conduct this project with fiscal accountability and strong systems for quality fiscal controls in order to manage and account for all funds and make expenditures in alignment with the proposed project budget.

Reader's Score: 6

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:

No strengths noted.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not demonstrate that it is a qualifying entity or has a partner who is a qualifying entity of promoting equity in student access to educational resources and opportunities as noted in the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA), i.e., community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, Tribal colleges and universities, and/or minority-serving institutions.

The applicant does not expressly state that it currently has identified the community colleges that will be partnering in this project (p. e36).

Reader's Score: 0

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 apply for this Competitive Preference Priority 2.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not apply for this Competitive Preference Priority 2.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
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Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	23
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	8
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	7
Sub Total	70	58
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Promoting Equity	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Workforce Diversity	2	0
Sub Total	7	0
Total	77	58

Technical Review Form

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

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

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 the development of a new technology platform to assist teachers in delivering, and students in engaging with, an evidence-based social and emotional learning curriculum, clearly demonstrating a promising new strategy that builds on an existing strategy (p. e19). The applicant thoroughly demonstrates the research base for social and emotional approaches, citing various studies and meta analyses (p. e19-e20). Additionally, the applicant describes the effectiveness of the "Social Skills Improvement System Classwide Intervention Program" (SSIS CIP), which demonstrated efficacy in an RCT for several academic and non-academic outcomes (p. e21). Finally, the applicant demonstrates the use of their proposed online platform to support teacher delivery and student skill acquisition, citing three use cases for the technology enhancement: greater opportunities for student practice, automatic feedback to supplement teacher feedback, and classroom management support (p. e24-26). This thorough and well-thought out approach to using technology to build upon an existing strategy represents an excellent demonstration of a promising new strategy.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 23

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 demonstrates that its proposed project is rooted in a high-quality and theoretically sound conceptual framework, through its description of the proposed project and the appended logic model. First, the applicant describes the CASEL competency framework upon which its curriculum is aligned (p. e27-28). CASEL is a research-based, universally accepted approach to social and emotional learning that is rooted in five competencies (p. e27). Additionally, the applicant explains the conceptual framework underlying the technology component, known as the EPCAL delivery system, which directly addresses the conditions required for students to acquire social and emotional learning skills (p. e28-e29). The applicant brings all the elements of the conceptual framework together in a well-written and thorough logic model appended to the application (p. e79).

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 has four high-level goals with a set of aligned objectives and specific outcomes and performance measures designed to measure the degree to which the objectives were achieved. Moreover, the applicant lists the year and quarter that each activity takes place and the specific owner of the activity (by name) (e30). Many of the listed objectives are specific and many have clear performance measures to demonstrate that they are measurable (p. e30). For example, objective 4 is to "conduct pilot testing at North Ed," which they will consider achieved when "20 students complete all 12 skill units," demonstrating both specificity and measurability (p. e30).

Weaknesses:

While some of the objectives listed were measurable, there were also some objectives that were broad and not measurable. For example, objective 13 is "prepare marketing/recruitment materials" and its outcomes are listed as "marketing/recruitment materials prepared briefed to schools" (p. e31). Objectives such as these, lack specificity and are not clearly measurable beyond whether the activities were completed or not.

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

The applicant clearly states a target population: 5th and 6th grade students in rural school district in Northern Michigan who are served by "North Ed," a government agency supporting several school districts in that region of the state (p. e32). The applicant gives a rationale for testing 5th and 6th graders (ability to communicate with text messaging) and offers a number of important data about the general student population relevant to this work, for instance, noting that about half of students were eligible for FRL, and less than half demonstrated proficiency on NAEP (p. e32). The applicant mentions a few additional relevant variables about rural districts in relation to teacher shortages and underfunding (p. e33).

Sub

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not demonstrate knowledge of any of the specific social and emotional needs of the target student population. For example, the applicant could have used the results of a survey or a needs assessment targeting the specific population of students. Rather, the applicant is using a subset of a standardized curriculum, without any clear rationale for how the specific curriculum objectives meet this needs of this target population, beyond their age, general demographic and academic characteristics, and elements that are similar to other rural populations (p. e32-33).

Reader's Score: 9

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 describes the qualifications of principal investigator and several co-principal investigators with many years of experience in leading largescale projects. Additionally, the relevant personnel are experts in the key elements of the project, including social and emotional learning, the SSIS CIP curriculum, and the online platform proposed by the applicant (p. e34-35). Finally, the applicant notes a commitment to hiring applicants from historically underrepresented groups and cites two community colleges and an employment agency as target partners in hiring for new project positions (p. e36).

Weaknesses:

While the applicant notes a commitment to diversity in hiring, the applicant does not provide any specific plan or evidence that their recruitment efforts will actually encourage applications from individuals from historically underrepresented groups. There is no information about the employment agency or the community colleges that ensures they are places that encourage applications from diverse groups (p. e36).

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: 7

Sub

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

Strengths:

The applicant has a mostly clear and well-structured management plan in order to achieve many of the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget (p. e30-e31). For most activities, the plan assigns a task owner and a timeline, demonstrating forethought in the implementation of the project (p. e30-e31). The applicant also includes a clear description of the budget and associated notes that are aligned with the proposed management plan, including a breakdown of costs by budget year (p. e98).

Weaknesses:

While the applicant includes a table with objectives and timelines, the applicant does not provide adequate details for some of the main project activities and responsibilities. For instance, some of the activities listed include “develop website,” “present to schools,” and “cost analysis completed” (p. e30-31). The lack of details for certain activities calls into question whether they will be implemented at a high level.

Reader's Score: 7

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 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 addressed by applicant.

Weaknesses:

Not addressed by applicant.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

- 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:

Not addressed by applicant.

Weaknesses:

Not addressed by applicant.

Reader's Score: **0**

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/14/2023 06:43 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/29/2023 11:07 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

Reader #1: *****

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

Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 3: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

Reader's Score: 28

Sub

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

Strengths:

This application outlines a cluster Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) where 5th and 6th-grade classrooms will be assigned to either the Social Skills Improvement System Classwide Intervention Program (SSIS CIP) or a Business As Usual control (e38). The applicants clearly understand the standards required by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC). They address concerns of cross-contamination, highlighting that the specialized training and software needed for the intervention makes such issues improbable, enhancing the study's validity (e38). To minimize attrition, both teachers and students will be compensated for their participation (e38). Based on past implementations, the applicants anticipate an attrition rate not exceeding 5%, which is important evidence. In the event of attrition, they plan to use an accepted method of imputation (e39). They will also adhere to WWC standards by using standardized measures to document outcomes (e40, 87-88). The evaluation team's independence is clear (e31, e35, e62). They are affiliated with a partner university and are not involved in the intervention's design or execution.

Weaknesses:

The letters of support do not address the mechanism of randomization. Given that the randomization of classrooms and teachers often presents challenges in school-based studies, the omission of this critical aspect in the support letters is a notable weakness in this section.

Reader's Score: 18

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:

In this application, the section fully meets this criterion, demonstrating significant strength. The applicants intend to gather formative data during the pilot phase and continuously thereafter (e11-12, e29-31). With plans to release both quarterly and annual reports, the evaluation team is set to collect and share formative data to monitor progress towards the desired results (e29, e30-32, e39). Furthermore, the strategy for the iterative enhancement of the intervention is both robustly constructed and sufficiently detailed in this proposal (e29).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

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

Strengths:

The project outcomes are clearly detailed (e40, 79), highlighting student results like increased rates of prosocial behaviors and academic achievements (e37). The applicants have also proposed classroom variables as moderators and learning approaches as mediators (e37, e41). To ensure adherence to the project's design and objectives, fidelity of implementation measures will be utilized. This will help in identifying the measurable threshold for acceptable implementation. Notably, this portion of the plan is effectively displayed in a table format within the narrative (e41).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/29/2023 11:07 AM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/29/2023 11:07 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	25
Sub Total	30	25
Total	30	25

Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 3: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Educational Testing Service (S411C230179)

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: 25

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's proposed project of developing middle school students' social emotional learning skill applications through technology enhanced collaborative learning serving 800 students in grades 5 and 6 who are identified as high-needs due to poverty and graduation rates. The Social Skills Improvement System Class-wide Intervention Program, (SSIS CIP) is one of three SEL programs recognized as a Tier I Strong program by WWC and is a Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Select program (e 21). The external evaluator has extensive experience in overseeing evaluation of educational interventions in U.S. Department of Education projects, is experienced with the curriculum materials and implementation issues in schools where the curriculum has been evaluated, including cost analysis, and has led evaluations of the SSIS CIP curriculum in prior projects (e 35). The formal evaluations during the final phase of the project utilizes a multi-site cluster randomized trial to evaluate the efficacy of the EPCAL SSIS-CIP SEL in middle grades in two rural school districts (e 36). The evaluation meets WWC standards and affords the opportunity to evaluate proximal, medial, and distal student outcomes. This early-phase project is designated to produce at least moderate evidence (positive finding, RCT, multiple sites, N>350). The proposed project will serve 30 schools in the rural school district therefore meeting the 25% EIR funds for awards as noted in the Federal Registry for the program.

Weaknesses:

The proposed project provides details of hiring individuals who will serve in key positions after the grant is awarded. The key positions will be involved in the pilot and main study data collection in the schools, and analysis and reporting positions (e 35-36). This section would have been stronger with information on the selection of the key positions. The applicant lacks descriptions of measurement methods for the observation of students' behaviors, behavioral indicators, and analyzing surveying of students.

Reader's Score: 16

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

Sub

Strengths:

The independent evaluation team will be involved in the development phase and will engage in quarterly meetings with the Co-Directors and development team to review progress toward performance objectives (e 39). The evaluation team will have access to products and data generated through pilot testing and usage surveys; therefore, allowing for necessary refinement of the procedures and methods for the formal evaluation to ensure the randomized trial yields relevant, valid, and actionable conclusions regarding the initial efficacy of the EPCAL SSIS CIP. The applicant will collect a comprehensive set of student and implementation measures on two occasions (pre-, post) for each of the cohorts.

Weaknesses:

None noted in this section.

Reader's Score: 5

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

Strengths:

The evaluation plan utilizes multiple measures, methods, and sources to assess proximal, medial, and distal outcomes (e 40). The Hierarchical Linear Modeling will be used to evaluate the effects of treatment. The proposed project will analyze 3-level HLM models in which students are nested in classrooms and classrooms are nested within the schools/sites (e 40). The proposed project's modeling complexity attributes to the three-level structures, so the program will test the degree to which the schools differ with respect to each of the key outcomes. The project will assess baseline equivalence and controls for variable showing significant nonequivalence to mitigate bias.

Weaknesses:

The applicant lacks details of a measurable threshold for the proposed project.

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/29/2023 11:07 AM