

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/28/2023 03:35 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	24
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	7
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Sub Total	70	61
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	61

Technical Review Form

Panel #15 - EIR Early-Phase - 15: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

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 clearly demonstrates that the proposed project, Pathways, will provide promising new strategies that build on current processes. For example the system will provide tracking of early identification of students with mental health concerns and use that data to make informed interventions for that student and ensure that appropriate interventions are internalized by the student and improve mental health. (Page e19 and e23-24)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

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: 24

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 clearly demonstrates a strong evidence-based foundation for the proposed project. The framework includes the integration of universal social-emotional learning programs, school-based data-based decision-making, evidence-based mental health interventions and a multi-tiered system of interventions. These are existing elements that have been researched for effectiveness. The schools involved in the proposed project will use the Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS) as the universal mental health screener. (Pages e10, e25 and e98)

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly define how the BESS will be administrated and by whom. Without that information it is not clear how effective this tool will be.

Reader's Score: 8

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 outlines five specific and measurable goals. For example, Goal five is to improve mental health and well-being of all students including those students identified with internalized mental health concerns. (e129-e133 and e27-e29)

The applicant clearly describes the objectives and outcomes for each of the key components of the project and aligns key activities to each objective. For example, Objective 1 is to develop beta version of Pathways. The activities include collecting literature and then beginning the development of the Pathways digital program.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly link the objectives to the goals. For example, one of the goals is to enhance data-based decision-making processes; however, the applicant does not specifically address this goal within the six objectives. Therefore, it is not clear if that goal is measurable. (Page e26-e29)

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 supports the needs of the target population by using data from California Health Kids Survey Results indicating an increase in self-reported chronic sadness and hopelessness when comparing 2017-2019 to 2019-2021.(Page e100)

The applicant does rely on data to indicate that the findings of Weist et al., (2022) found that students in schools with mental health screening and identification and effective professional development were more likely to receive targeted interventions. This proposed project uses this data for some the interventions to meet the needs of the target population. (Page e38)

Sub

Weaknesses:

The applicant states that there is a “pressing need” to improve how mental health screening data informs universal prevention efforts; however, the applicant does not provide data to support what the pressing need is. Without that type of data it is difficult to determine significance of the need. (Page e19 and e142)

Reader's Score: 12

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: 7

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 proposed project is supported by key project personnel who are well qualified to address the scope of the proposed project. Their relevant training and experience includes the application of a wide range of educational and leadership skills. (Pages e31-33 and Resumes Pages e67-e93)

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not include information that outlines the extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented.

Reader's Score: 7

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,**

Sub

and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

Strengths:

The management plan includes clearly defined responsibilities, timelines and milestones for the proposed project. The responsibilities are clearly tied to the goals and/or objectives of the proposed project. The timeline included is appropriate for completion of the project on time and within budget. For example, the development phase of the project is set for an eight month timeline. (Page e34)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were 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:

No strengths identified.

Weaknesses:

Although the applicant indicates that they are addressing this priority, the interventions outlined do not include any partnerships with entities outlined in the criteria.

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:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	30
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	8
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Sub Total	70	68
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	68

Technical Review Form

Panel #15 - EIR Early-Phase - 15: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

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 provided an exhaustive description of the significance of project Pathways that included the severity of the problem and the promising new strategies upon which it is built. The project will be implemented in partnership with the Placer County Office of Education (PCOE) and the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) to improve student mental health and well-being in schools. It will involve the development of a free digital program of best practices in equitable data-based decision-making to improve prevention of mental health concerns and connect all students to evidence-based, culturally responsive interventions regardless of race, ethnicity, or disability to ensure positive mental health, improved academic achievement and school success (p. e19).

To document the need for the project, the applicant provided a concise summary of the need for the project because of the severity of needs of youth before and after the pandemic (p. e21-22). For example, before the pandemic approximately one half of youth (one in six) with mental health challenges received treatment. The applicant also described the impact of post pandemic challenges such as fear, grief, anxiety, and economics, which increased the need for comprehensive mental health systems to support the direct connection of services with youth-services that are vital to the mental health well-being of youth.

The applicants also identified challenges to project implementation such as integrating mental health services and alignment of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives into school-based systems and accurate identification to ensure affected students can successfully access mental health services. To address these challenges, project Pathways will provide a scalable, freely available digital program to improve universal SEL, Data Based Decision Making (DBDM) and the identification and intervention delivery for students with mental health concerns (p. e22-23).

To further document the existing strategies upon which the project is built, the applicant provided a detailed chart that identified and described the implementation framework and practices of Pathways: Social-Emotional Learning, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Data-Based Decision-Making and Culturally Responsive Practices. The framework will guide the design and implementation of project Pathways--a free resource that will be on-demand, educator and user-friendly, not intrusive on invaluable direct instruction time, always available, and integrated into existing professional learning and decision-making systems to build the capacity to help students in need (p. e24-25).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 30

Sub

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

Strengths:

The applicant provided a thorough and sound description of the conceptual framework and its reputation for effectiveness for the proposed project, Pathways. The project is based upon a solid evidence-based foundation. It also leverages existing initiatives and implementation to ensure project success. Project resources include well-documented successful evidence-based interventions in SEL, Mental Health screenings, and Mental Health interventions. Because a coordinated one-stop resource access does not exist for these resources, Pathways will support educators by providing a digital platform for accessing information, identifying SEL support needs, matching them with student needs, connecting intervention recommendations, and creating applicable reports for record-keeping (p. e25-26).

To further document the conceptual framework, the applicant will integrate AI-based capacity into the digital platform to facilitate identification of evidence-based recommendations. These will be enhanced by the inclusion of "how-to" resources. The specific and detailed Logic Model (p. e97) provided additional support and documentation of the conceptual framework and included related Inputs, Outputs (Activities and Participation), and Outcomes (Short, Medium, Long). The logic model illustrated how Pathways will address critical gaps in school-based MH, DBDM, and service delivery (p. e19). For example, the following information was included in the Logic Model: Inputs-Universal social-emotional learning programs; Outputs (Activities-Curate a digital repository of MH screening and intervention resources and Participation-Middle school students receive universal SEL and participate in universal MH screening); and Short Term Outcomes-Students with internalizing MH concerns receive targeted evidence-based interventions, Medium Outcomes-Identified students experience less internalizing behaviors, and Long Term Outcomes-Students with internalizing MH concerns are identified and receive intervention before concerns negatively impact their lives (p. e97).

The identified framework will facilitate the monitoring of project activities to document successful outcomes achievement, which will ultimately lead to lower internalizing behaviors by students receiving interventions, more positive perceptions of school climate, improved achievement across subgroups of students, and a decreased likelihood of suspensions and increased attendance (p. e26).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

Sub

Reader's Score: 10

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

Strengths:

The applicant provided a detailed and focused description of the purpose goals, objectives, and expected outcomes of the Pathways project. The description was presented in a thorough explanation of the project, which included a statement of the purpose: To develop Pathways, a free digital platform, using a co-design process with educators and rigorously evaluating the project to meet What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards (p. e27).

A concise description of the five goals of the project was also provided to further define Pathways (i.e., co-design Pathways with educators, students, and families; enhance data-based decision-making processes; and build capacity to implement culturally responsive, evidence-based targeted interventions for students with internalizing MH concerns (p. e26-27).

The description was further supported by a detailed table (p. e27-29), which summarized six Objectives, with identification of Activities and Output and Outcome Measures for each Activity. For example, for Objective 2: Co-design and pilot Pathways implementation and training materials, the following information was provided: Activity 2.5: Conduct cognitive interviews on Pathways and Pathways Inventory with educators; and Output and Outcome Measure(s): Qualitative data (p. e28). The specific and well-defined measurable objectives and data will facilitate the efficient monitoring of project progress and achievement of expected outcomes.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

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 provided a sound and comprehensive description to support Pathways design and its ability to successfully and appropriately address the needs of the target population, schools, and community. The process will begin at the very beginning with co-design development and will continue throughout the entire project with inclusion and input of all applicable stakeholders-educators, students, and families. This will ensure that the project is appropriate for school implementation and is aligned with the needs of schools and students (p. e29). The applicant and partners will collaborate with the identified middle school teams, who will have specific roles, to build positive relationships to facilitate an understanding of the unique needs and challenges faced by the staff, students, and families. Identified strategies will be uniquely appropriate to target students in each middle school.

Appropriate procedures will then be developed that address the identified needs of the target population. To further ensure the appropriateness and facilitate monitoring and achievement of project outcomes of the design for the target population, the applicant provided a description of the population of the 24 middle schools (to be recruited) that will incorporate Pathways into daily practice and implement all project activities with fidelity, i.e., 56% white, 10% Hispanic, 10% Asian, 2% Black; 5%-71% free/reduced lunch; and diverse locations--rural, suburban and city (pp. e30-31). The applicant also provided documentation of the need for the project as indexed in the California Healthy Kids Survey, which indicated an 8% increase in the percentage of students reporting chronic sadness or hopelessness during and after the pandemic (p. e31).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

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 provided a thorough and concise description of key project staff. The description, documented by resumes, included the pertinent and diverse experiences and expertise of each key project staff member. In addition to the two co-directors and senior staff from the applicant organization, the additional highly qualified key project members include an internationally recognized content expert and designated central office staff of Placer County Office of Education. The expertise of key project staff include research, special education policy, systems change, psychology, fidelity monitoring, and administration. As an example of the qualifications of key project staff, the applicant included the resume of Dr. Nicholas Gage, Pathways Project Director, which documented 20 years of extensive experience as senior special education researcher, over 100 peer reviewed publications using student, classroom, and school data, and whose content expertise includes prevention science, multitiered systems of support, and special education (p. e71-72).

The proposed project will also be supported by a diverse advisory board that will annually meet to provide input and direction on project progress and successes with a focus on protocols and professional development activities. Like the key project staff, the advisory board is comprised of well-qualified individuals, including three content experts from Old Dominion University in Virginia, the Medical University of South Carolina, and the University of Oregon who have expertise in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Special Education and experience as Principal Investigators (p. e32). Inclusive in the board membership is Dr. Colleen Halliday (Medical University of South Carolina) who has experience in interventions to reduce racial/ethnic disparities in aggression and violence (p. e33).

To provide further diversity, of particular importance, is the inclusion on the project advisory board of two parents of Placer County students, two educators who will assist in the co-design process, and representatives from the California Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (p. e33).

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not provide assurances that it would 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.

Sub

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 provided a comprehensive and highly detailed description of the management plan for the proposed project, Pathways, and included a statement of assurance that the project objectives would be achieved on time and within budget (p. e33). To further describe the Management Plan, the applicant presented a precise Table with project activities categorized into three phases, with a sequential relationship between each phase: 1) Development and Co-Design, 2) RCT Evaluation, and 3) Dissemination. The table included clearly defined Key Milestones, Defined Responsibilities (individuals/organizations) for each Milestone, and the Timelines for each Key Milestone for each year of the Pathways project. For example, for Phase 2: RCT Evaluation, the applicant provided the following information: Milestone: Train Cohorts 1-3 on Pathways; Responsible: WestEd, PCOE; and Timeline: Aug 2025, Aug 2026, Aug 2027 (p. e33-34).

To further support the quality of the management plan, the applicant also included specific information on the monitoring process of project activities, which will be implemented to facilitate achievement of the identified milestones. The process will include weekly review meetings with project leads; monthly meetings with the applicant and evaluation team to review information such as fidelity protocols, implementation, data collection, and barriers to success; and annual meetings with the project advisory board (p. e34). The specific and well-defined procedures outlined in the management plan will facilitate monitoring of project progress toward outcomes achievement.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

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:

No strengths noted.

Weaknesses:

The applicant indicated in the Project Abstract (p. e15) that it would address Competitive Preference Priority 1: Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners. However, the applicant did not describe in the narrative how the proposed project, Pathways, will be implemented in partnership with either of the following entities: community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, tribal colleges and universities, or minority-serving institutions.

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:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
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Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	30
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	7
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Sub Total	70	67
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	67

Technical Review Form

Panel #15 - EIR Early-Phase - 15: 84.411C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

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 has thoroughly demonstrated that there is an existing gap between interventions implemented in schools and the outcomes of improved mental health and well-being. While there are currently many school-based mental health (MH) initiatives, the systems and processes do not “support referral pathways that lead to effective and responsive MH services (Eklund et al., 2020),”(p.e21). This lack of pathways decreases the likelihood that students will be identified early, and when they are identified, that they will receive appropriate services to match their needs and strengths. (p. e21- e22).

The applicant references numerous sources defining the scope of the problem, which includes the importance of early identification of students with internalizing MH needs for future health outcomes (p. e22), as well as highlighting the need for schools to have “equitable, efficient, and proactive approaches for using data to identify students with internalizing MH needs and align the identified needs with effective interventions” (p. e23).

The applicant included supporting evidence of the need for improved identification processes for internalized mental health concerns, noting that in California “there was an 8% increase in the percentage of students reporting chronic sadness or hopelessness after the pandemic began and that students are less likely to be identified for school-based services with internalizing MH concerns than externalizing (e.g., aggression and conduct problems (p.e20).

The applicant highlights that many more children and adolescents are experiencing significant internalizing MH concerns after living through a pandemic, and that students from diverse backgrounds are rarely identified even when concerns exist (p.e20-21).

Building upon the current mental health support services in schools, the applicant will develop an intervention that addresses the identified gaps. The project will integrate existing strategies in an innovative platform that will increase information and education, identification of mental health concerns, social emotional learning, and access to interventions, thus improving student well-being outcomes (p. 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: 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 conceptual framework outlined by the applicant draws upon existing programs and intervention with a strong evidence-base. "Pathways will include a comprehensive library of universal SEL (Social-Emotional Learning), MH screening, DBDM (Data Based Decision Making), and MH interventions, as well as referral pathway resources focused on teams centering equity as they develop their referral pathways"(p. e25). The applicant will co-design Pathways with a team of experts and stakeholders. The participant has a detailed logic model with clearly defined inputs (such as universal SEL, universal MH screening, school based DBDM), outputs (such as co-designing critical features, developing training resources), short-term outcomes (for example, students with internalized MH concerns receive interventions), and long-term outcomes (students report lower incidences of internalized MH concerns, students report a more positive school climate, attendance improves) (p. e98).

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 includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The applicant's goals are clearly stated and operationally defined. The applicant will measure feasibility through multiple fidelity indicators (p. e42), acceptability using focus groups and the Usage Rating Profile, and several student outcomes measures, including scores on the BIMAS (Behavior Intervention Monitoring Assessment System) and CHKS (California Healthy Kids Survey), discipline and suspension rates, attendance rates, and interventions received (p. e40).

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's proposed project integrates several well researched frameworks and will combine them into a comprehensive, scalable program. Expanding upon research that indicates that universal SEL implemented with fidelity is effective at reducing office discipline referrals and suspension (p.e142), and that universal MH screening in Tier II and Tier III is connected with the identification of more students with MH concerns than traditional, non-

Sub

screener methods (p. e142), the applicant will design and implement a program that increases identification and access to interventions. Furthermore, the program will equip schools to develop a school-wide vision of using data and utilizing data to drive decision-making, which is recommended to improve schools' abilities to meet student needs (p. e142). The increased resources and early identification will support access to effective services for students, and DBDM will allow schools to identify what interventions are effective at attaining their long-term desirable outcomes.

The applicant indicates that their Pathways program is unique as "there is currently no scalable program that helps schools develop equitable and efficient mental health referral pathway processes without overburdening staff and resources." (p.e20).

Using a co-design process, the applicant will ensure that the feedback from parents, educators, experts and other stakeholders is included in the design of the project (p. e29).

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: 7

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 several highly qualified staff working on the project, with decades of experience in the areas of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and MH (Dr. Nicholas Gage, Project Director), "systems change with a multi-tiered framework and on social-emotional assessment and intervention across youth-serving systems" (Dr. Natalie Romer, Pathways Co-Director), school and adolescent health initiatives (Sara Geierstanger Sr. Researcher). In addition to the project staff, the applicant will utilize the expertise of an advisory board. The advisory board will include experts in the field of Social Behavior Supports at Old Dominion (Susan Barrett), Dr. Colleen Halliday, a faculty member of the Medical University of South Carolina and the Principal Investigator (PI) of an ongoing Random Controlled Trial (RCT) of the Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF) enhanced with interventions to reduce racial/ethnic disparities in aggression and violence, and the Co-Director of the Center on PBIS and lead of the center's Equity Workgroup at the University of Oregon (Dr. Kent McIntosh)(p.e32). Other representation on the advisory board will include two parents of students, two educators participating in the co-design process, and state representation from the California Department of Education and California Department of Health and Human Services (p.e33).

Sub

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not address the process by which the organization encourages applications for employment from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Reader's Score: 7

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 developed a timeline with multiple phases of implementation and has identified milestones for each phase of the project. The project has a clear co-design phase and pilot phase. Milestones have been identified, along with the entities responsible for completing the milestones and the date range target for completion. The responsibilities of each staff member are detailed in the proposal (p. e33-e34).

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:

No strengths noted.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not identify a partnership with or implementation by one of the listed entities.

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:

Not addressed.

Weaknesses:

Not addressed.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 08/28/2023 03:34 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/26/2023 08:38 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	19
Sub Total	30	19
Total	30	19

Technical Review Form

Panel #10 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 10: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

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: 19

Sub

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

Strengths:

The evaluation plan includes a randomized controlled trial (RCT) that meets What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards without reservations if well implemented. The evaluation plan discusses how the issues of joiners and attrition will be handled in the proposed data analyses (page e37) to meet WWC requirements. Baseline equivalency of treatment and control groups will be determined using a randomization procedure for which potential blocking variables have been identified (page e37), to eliminate the potential for biased or confounded outcomes. The application also describes how missing data will be handled (page e41). The evaluation will be conducted by an independent evaluator with the background and skills to conduct the evaluation (page e34). The application includes the model for the planned hierarchical linear model in an appendix (page e103) and the impact analysis describes how the model will be analyzed to determine a difference between treatment and control groups (page e40). The evaluator is included in most of the data collection and evaluation procedures identified in Table 3 (page e33), which has the potential to provide the evaluators with useful insights for the evaluation. The application includes plans to obtain Institutional Review Board approval (page e33), to meet human subjects guidelines. The reliability and validity of most of the data collection instruments is provided in the application (page e35). The application includes a confirmatory research question to identify impacts on student and school outcomes, as well as on teacher perceptions of students' mental health (page e35). The application indicates that all study schools will use the same SEL tool (BESS, page e38), to minimize the need for standardizing results from different tools.

Weaknesses:

The cohort structure described in the application is not well defined (page e30). For example, it is not clear if data on the C-1 cohort will also be collected along with data collected for the C-2 and C-3 cohorts. This additional data collection could provide useful information about the continued use of the intervention beyond one year. It is also not clear if the data collected for cohort C-1 will be analyzed and the results and feedback then used to modify the intervention for subsequent cohorts. It is not clear that the planned use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) (page e23, page e26) or a decision-tree based on prior-determined indicators or risk and resilience (page e30) are appropriate for meeting the goal of increasing equitable, accurate, and early identification of students who are internalizing mental health (MH) concerns (page e19). The application might be improved with some evidence of how these methods will be used and if they have been used successfully in similar applications. It is not clear that any of the evaluators

Sub

have experience with evaluating the use of AI as an effective tool for the proposed innovation. Although AI appears on the resume for the project director, none of his activities or publications appear to be directly related to AI. The application does not indicate if the three middle schools that will participate in the co-design process (page e29) will also be included in the study groups of schools. Including these schools in the RCT study could create a bias in the results. The evaluation plan could be improved if the evaluators were also part of the feedback milestones (page e33). The evaluation plan could be improved with an evaluation of the professional development program to be developed during Phase I (page e33). The application could be improved with data collection on the business as usual social and emotional learning procedures (page e37). Although the application indicates that all study schools will use the same SEL tool, any differences in business-as-usual methods for identifying students should be identified as a potential source of variation in outcomes. Because the goal of this intervention is to develop a diagnostic tool to identify students with internalized MH conditions, the evaluation plan could be improved with data collected to establish the efficacy of this intervention.

Reader's Score: 12

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

Strengths:

The application indicates that the evaluators will be active throughout the entire project (page e42). Details about data collection time periods are provided in the Milestones table (page e33). The application indicates that WestEd and the evaluators will meet monthly to review fidelity protocols, randomization, implementation, data collection, and barriers to success (page e34). Regular meetings between the evaluators and the key personnel and Advisory Board has the potential to provide useful feedback to establish progress towards intended project outcomes.

Weaknesses:

The evaluation plan could be improved with the inclusion of the evaluation team during the feedback portions of Phase I. Including the evaluators with the feedback from the Advisory Board during this Phase has the potential to provide useful information for the evaluation process. The evaluation plan could be improved with more details about reliability and validity of all the data to be collected. For example, the application does not indicate if the reliability of the Mental Health Supports Modules of California Health Kids Survey (page e35) will be established. It is not clear which team member will be responsible for completing the school level Fidelity of Implementation (FOI) (page e40).

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 identifies specific tools to be used to measure internalizing behaviors, intervention receipt, school climate and well-being (pages e38 to e39). Specific levels of participation are provided to assess fidelity of implementation (page e42). The evaluation plan includes exploratory research questions on the impacts of potential mediators and moderating/differential impacts along with appropriate data sources (page e36).

Weaknesses:

The application could be improved with more details about the mediators. It is not clear how teacher perception of mental health support will be used to evaluate the efficacy of the planned intervention.

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/26/2023 08:38 AM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/25/2023 03:58 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	17
Sub Total	30	17
Total	30	17

Technical Review Form

Panel #10 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 10: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: WestEd (S411C230033)

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: 17

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 proposal adequately explains their design for the study. For example, their plan incorporates excluding joiners and will include all the students at the point of randomization in the analytic sample, which is in alignment with the WWC standards, and would increase the likelihood of the study meeting WWC standards without reservations. The alternate plan of conducting a quasi-experimental study with propensity score matching also increases the likelihood of their study meeting WWC standards. Both of these designs will produce evidence about their project effectiveness.

Regarding outcomes, most of the outcome measures listed on page e35 will meet WWC criteria for appropriate outcome measures. The proposal also discusses appropriate reliability and validity of all the outcome measures so this increases the likelihood of the study meeting WWC standards.

A clear outcome model is described on page e103 that will be used for the impact analysis and includes the randomization blocks in the analysis as dependent variables as required by WWC standards. The proposal does discuss their study being adequately powered to detect the effect sizes that were found in other studies, so this is promising to detect any effects.

Weaknesses:

The proposal includes different information on the recruitment and randomization of the schools, which makes it hard to evaluate their evaluation plan and leads to ambiguity about their approach. For example, in Table 2 on page e30, the proposal discusses that the schools will be recruited in three cohorts of 8 middle schools (notes say 10 school – 5 treatment and 5-control) in Years 2, 3 and 4. However, on page e37 the proposal states that randomization will occur in summer of 2025 and each school will be in the assigned condition for 3 years. Such discrepancies makes it harder to evaluate their plan.

As the study plans to use Cluster-level RCT, they need to account for cluster as well as student attrition. However, it is unclear from their proposal if the authors are planning to account for both. For example, the proposal will be

Sub

stronger if they discuss their plans for reducing attrition at all levels - school, teacher, and student levels. High attrition at the cluster level can make a study to not meet WWC standards.

The proposal discusses collecting data from middle school (page e39). However, some of these students would have graduated in the 3 years of the study. The proposal should discuss how the students in each of the grades will be treated in the analysis. For example, the proposal should discuss how the students who have graduated from middle schools at the end of the 3 years will be tracked or included in the study. This may increase the probability of higher attrition in the student group assigned at randomization. On page e40, the proposal discusses that the student-level outcomes will include the receipt of intervention (dichotomous) but this is a dependent variable and not an outcome.

On page e40 and e41, the proposal discusses imputation of missing data. The proposal will be stronger if it discussed which missing data will be imputed, as WWC standards do not allow for the imputation of outcome data (or in certain circumstances) and requires dropping observations with missing outcomes data to meet WWC standards.

Reader's Score: 10

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 proposal clearly describes a plan during the co-design process for feedback from various stakeholders on the appropriateness of the outcomes and fidelity measure. This may increase the feasibility of capturing the correct outcomes, and the findings from the evaluation may further help scalability of the project. There are planned monthly meetings for feedback on fidelity that might also help ensure the intervention is implemented as planned.

Weaknesses:

The proposal should clearly describe how the outcomes will be measured periodically to examine achieving the intended benefit or progress towards it as hypothesized. For example, the proposal describes evaluating the outcomes at one point in time and does not provide any opportunity for performance feedback during the evaluation phase. The proposal will be stronger if there is a discussion on how the outcomes or what threshold of the fidelity measures will decide which schools will receive further training in additional years.

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 proposal clearly articulates the key project components on Table 1 on pages e26-28, that will be implemented, and measurable thresholds for acceptable implementation are included on page e42. Both of them give enough details on threshold and the reason for using that threshold for the fidelity of implementation. The proposal also provides a clear description of outcome measures, both exploratory and confirmatory.

Weaknesses:

On page e43, the proposal discusses that fidelity of implementation and educator's perception of student mental health supports as mediators. There are other key mediators that are missing, and the proposal will benefit from including more details on why these two listed mediators are the key mediators to consider.

Sub

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/25/2023 03:58 PM