

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/14/2023 07:17 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	20
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	26
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	8
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Sub Total	70	64
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	64

Technical Review Form

Panel #13 - EIR Early-Phase - 13: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

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:

Applicant identifies a dire need of national significance. They propose to develop, refine, test and analyze a proven strategy to improve students' critical thinking ability through an English language arts curriculum integrated with activities to reinforce and strengthen high school students' social and emotional learning development. They cite a sound body of research that identifies severe deficiencies in 8th grade students ELA performance and teachers' need for supports to teach deductive reasoning (e21). Their evidence-based intervention shows more promise than existing strategies to strengthen skills that are transferrable to other academic subjects.

Weaknesses:

none 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: 26

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:

Applicant provides a clearly articulated logic model. They offer a comprehensive plan to provide teacher supports, along with a proven instructional model to produce improved teacher efficacy and student outcomes. The quality of the framework is further evidenced by their plan to continue to development and refinement of core components to achieve the intended outcomes.

Weaknesses:

Applicant provides insufficient detail about the integration of social emotional learning in the instructional model provided in Exhibit 1. Only the senior capstone specifically incorporates SEL.

Reader's Score: 9

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:

Applicant offers an exceptionally detailed and comprehensive set of strategies, objectives, and outcomes. The timeline is ambitious and attainable given the focus on organized, specific and measurable goals. For example, Strategy 1.1. -- Create Thinking Pro curricular resources for teachers and coaches to use in urban settings -- will be conducted on a specific timeline, Jan 2024 to July 2026, and is aligned with a specific outcome and Measure 1.1 -- At least 95% of teachers at the pilot schools agree that Thinking Pro is feasible to implement and would support their students' needs.

Weaknesses:

none noted

Reader's Score: 5

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

Strengths:

Applicant has researched the target areas and has obtained commitment from schools with high need students to participate. They have discussed students' learning needs with school districts to prepare to adapt curriculum appropriately, and they plan to incorporate their continued feedback if the EIR grant is funded. Applicant demonstrates in Exhibit J1 the high-need criteria of participating 10th graders, including ethnicity and food-stamp eligibility. They cite the appropriateness of this intervention in underserved communities, where lower levels of motivation and civic engagement persist (e21).

Weaknesses:

The applicant is less clear about how the project will address the needs of students learning in urban, ethnically diverse settings. Although applicant has begun conversations with partner districts, they do not acknowledge specifically how the shift from rural to urban learning settings will inform the plan to adapt teacher supports.

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: 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 Project Director is appropriately qualified to monitor budget and ensure on-time deliverables. Project personnel possess the range and depth of expertise relevant to implement all phases of this project, and PI specifically has conducted recent research and leadership in the area of social and emotional learning. Applicant includes a general statement of non-discrimination in the workplace.

Weaknesses:

Applicant does not address a plan to actively encourage applicants from underrepresented groups. They do not identify tools or resources, such as journals or networks that they would use to recruit applicants from underrepresented groups should a vacancy occur.

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:

Applicant provides a thoroughly articulated management plan, including an organizational chart, and they clarify that Applicant is Prime and Think Habitats is key partner. Roles within both entities are clearly assigned. They provide in Chart J7 a timeline and structure for meetings to ensure the project is on track. PD is appropriately tasked with monitoring the timeline and budget. Timeline is also thorough to include dissemination and research activities (Appendix J8)

Sub

Weaknesses:

none 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:

CPP was not addressed

Weaknesses:

CPP not addressed

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 applicable

Weaknesses:

not applicable

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

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Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

Reader #2: *****

	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	8
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	10
Sub Total	70	62
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	62

Technical Review Form

Panel #13 - EIR Early-Phase - 13: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

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 provides a well thought out project proposal backed by research-based claims from various sources. The applicant clearly addresses four objectives for their project including adding new curriculum, holding a pilot study, and various cycles of refinement which shows how they plan to build upon existing strategies. The applicant clearly indicates that the intention is to add new content and to reach urban students where the initial program was for rural students which tells how the program will be an alternative to existing programs. On page e20 the applicant clearly expresses 5 ways in which this software would be new and innovative compared to existing curriculum. The applicant provides a thorough explanation of the project strategies in section A2 (e23-25). Although the program has a heavy academic-base, the applicant clearly shows how SEL will be integrated into the curriculum providing research-based SEL competencies to promote civic efficacy (e25). The applicant clearly researched and understands existing programs that are similar and provides a short synopsis on what they do and how the proposed project is different, more cost effective, and reduces some technological barriers. The application notes that self-efficacy is critical to SEL and that lower levels of self-efficacy is related to lower levels of motivation and engagement in learning especially in underserved communities and backs this claim with adequate research (e21-22). The applicant provides additional research that stand-alone SEL interventions are limited especially at the high school level (e23). Finally, the applicant indicates that the project materials integrate SEL into core instruction by encouraging students to practice self-awareness, responsible decision making and social perspectives (e24). These concepts are rooted in research from the CASEL framework (e25).

Weaknesses:

There were no noted weaknesses.

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)**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a very thorough, clear and conceptual framework for the proposed project. In Exhibit 1 (e29) the applicant lays out the framework in terms of teacher supports, instructional model, teacher efficacy, and student outcomes. Research in section A2 (e 23-25) provides a thorough explanation of the project strategies.

Weaknesses:

While the applicant ties in SEL with integrated activities and the capstone experience; details about SEL impacts and outcomes are not as clear.

Reader's Score: 9

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides a clear and adequate chart in exhibit 2 (e30-31) which provides clear objectives that are aligned with a specific timeline, strategies, outcomes and measures. The strategies and timeline are feasible and make sense. The outcomes and measures are adequate to determine project success. The project timeline in Appendix J (e125) clearly shows project tasks and milestones broken into years and quarters.

Weaknesses:

While the project objectives and outcomes are clear and measurable, there are no specific measures for SEL strategies or outcomes.

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 identifies the target population as 10th grades students in urban schools serving at least 30% of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and/or at least 25% of students from marginalized racial/ethnic groups (e32). The letters of support provided are adequate and speak to the commitment of the project. Specific demographics, and impact analysis documents in appendix J indicate a clear understanding of the student population.

Weaknesses:

There is a lack of clarity in how the applicant intends to modify the project to adapt from rural to urban populations. It is also unclear as to the specifics of the SEL strategies and interventions related to meeting the needs of the target populations.

Reader's Score: 11

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 clearly indicates the qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel. The project includes an extensive, well-qualified team. Resumes of key project personnel are included and more than sufficient to meet the proposed project objectives. The management organizational chart (e129) further shows how the different entities will work together to achieve the project goals.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly identify a plan to actively recruit members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented. The applicant mentions Section 1.1 of AIR Personnel Manual, but that information is not included.

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 clearly defines the roles and expectations for the management of the project. The applicant indicates its capacity to manage large-scale, multi-year grants and provides a history of managing similar projects. They have a thorough management plan, meeting plan, and responsibility plan with clear timelines and milestones as provided in Appendix J (e 125- 127). The plans are aligned with project goals and objectives and include clear strategies, outcomes, and responsibilities. The organizational chart (e129) further details their management plan. For example, the chart shows how specific key stakeholders on the leadership team and R&D Team will collaborate to provide continuous feedback to reach 10th grade ELA teachers and students and measure the impact through the evaluation team.

Sub

Weaknesses:

There were no noted weaknesses.

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:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

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:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

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Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	20	18
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	30	20
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Project Personnel	10	4
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	10	9
Sub Total	70	51
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	51

Technical Review Form

Panel #13 - EIR Early-Phase - 13: 84.411C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

Reader's Score: 18

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which the proposed project involves the development or demonstration of promising new strategies that build on, or are alternatives to, existing strategies. (20 points)

Strengths:

Extensive and thorough explanation for the need for a reading intervention that integrates SEL at the high school level. A few examples include how the program is based on reading science best practices and meeting the needs of adolescent literacy (E19), including an explanation of the relevance of the lower grand band research as the targeted student audience is below grade level.

Clear explanation on how this will be an extension of previously funded federal grant projects designed to support rural students, with the goal of the current proposal to test the effectiveness in urban population of students.

Outlined explicitly how this program is unlike other 10th grade reading curriculum by providing a comprehensive review of other options and how Thinking Pro is different because it is a student-centered curriculum that integrates literacy and SEL while incorporating local, regional, and national media with adaptable pacing which can be utilized without contentious internet accessibility and is cost effective.

Substantive description on why students need this intervention, including the fact that 69% of eighth-grade students scored below proficient in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (E21). Research and data outlining the needs of underserved communities and the impact of continued learning and high school graduation.

Research included the needs of teachers to effectively deliver student interventions such as instructional support, resources, and professional development on the integration of SEL and academics (E22), as well as the challenges that teachers face in differentiating classroom curriculum.

The application spoke to the global challenges surrounding SEL implementation and the importance of incorporating SEL in the high school environment (E22-23).

The applicant indicated SEL integration will occur by the student understanding the effect on themselves and others after reading local media and completing a capstone project that includes two core SEL competencies from CASEL, responsible decision making and self-awareness (E25).

There is an extensive explanation of evidence-based strategies for reading (E23-24). It expanded on this with an

Sub

analysis of current reading programs available for high school students, including strengths and weaknesses and differentiating those from Thinking Pro (E27-28) as well as the importance of 10th grade being a critical year.

Weaknesses:

The applicant states that the curriculum incorporates practices for social and emotional development that are aligned with the science of learning and development literature and recommendations in two WWC practice guides, Improving Adolescent Literacy and Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9, however it is not clear how the practices from these sources are incorporated due to the lack of details and information outlined.

Reader's Score: 18

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 20

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:

Very clearly articulated conceptual framework for the reading program intervention which includes teacher supports and efficacy in addition to five evidence-based strategies that will lead to positive reading outcomes for students.

Weaknesses:

The applicant indicates the programs instructional routines and materials integrate SEL into core instruction by encouraging students to consider the effects of their own and others' actions, however there are few details and further information on what this looks like beyond the capstone project and how teachers differentiate to meet diverse student needs throughout the intervention.

Reader's Score: 6

- 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 included clear and concise information in a table that outlines four objectives that will be met with a total of ten strategies (E30-31). The table further provides information on additional specific strategies, outcomes, and project output measures. Additional information and details are further explained in a narrative outlining the four objectives: Develop new curricular resources to supplement the current version of the curriculum, Refine Thinking Pro through two R&D cycles, Test Thinking Pro for impact, and Analyze, report, and disseminate findings about Thinking Pro.

Sub

Weaknesses:

The applicant states the goal is to accelerate students' reading comprehension, critical thinking, and civic efficacy in under-served urban high schools, it is unclear through the objectives, strategies and outcomes how civic efficacy is operationalized or how teachers will be supported in the integration and infusion of SEL throughout the project.

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 has a clear target population of urban youth, including disaggregated data by economic status and schools meeting a threshold for having a population of marginalized racial/ethnic groups.

Teacher input is infused throughout the project, including information in the application that was included as a result of meeting with local educational leaders of the grant region to identify needs of students for the curriculum to be successful (E33).

Weaknesses:

There is a lack of substantive research and details in the application on how the program, especially SEL strategies, will meet the unique needs of urban youth. The application lacked clarity on how the program will be modified or changed from the original target population of rural students to urban based on conversations with teachers and other research conducted.

Reader's Score: 10

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: 4

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:

Project staff have extensive experience working with urban communities (E33) as well as significant academic credentials and years of organizational and individual experience in federal grant management, evaluation, curriculum development, effective reading strategies and teacher support.

Sub

Weaknesses:

While the credentials and experience outlined by the lead project staff is impressive, details were lacking on who would be responsible for changes to curriculum that would support the SEL integration.

While the applicant shared the project team represents a diverse group of individuals it is not clear how this is defined and looks like within the project team. Although the applicant states the organizations commitment to advancing standards for diversity, equity, and inclusion and notes a reference to their human resources policy manual around discrimination, it is not clear how the organization encourages and promotes applications from underrepresented groups.

Reader's Score: 4

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: 9

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 application included a cost analysis per student for the grant compared to other reading interventions which demonstrated a reasonable cost basis (E124).

The applicant outlined a detailed project timeline which was further broken into four categories which included the responsible agency (E125). An additional project management plan was included with four objectives with 11 strategies that include detailed outcomes, responsible agency, and targeted timelines (E126-127). The applicant has clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks that align with outcomes and can be measured on a day-to-day basis. An example of a measurable task which is clearly defined as being the responsibility of Thinking Habits is Performance Objective 1: Develop new curricular resource to supplement the current version which will be supported in completion of Strategy 1.2. Create Thinking Pro playbooks for instruction and coaching supports with the anticipated outcome that Thinking Pro develops additional resources (e.g., stretch-text and text-based discussion guides and playbooks for teachers and coaches).

Weaknesses:

The application is not explicitly clear how SEL will be achieved through objectives and milestones making it difficult to assess the ability of the management plan to operationalize SEL as the priority of the application.

Reader's Score: 9

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1:

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

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

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

Strengths:

The applicant did not address this priority.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not address this priority.

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
Last Updated: 09/14/2023 04:55 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/29/2023 09:37 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

Reader #1: *****

	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 #1 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 1: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

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 project uses a mixed methods experimental evaluation (E36) with randomized school assignments, thus meeting What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservation (E37). Research questions are well-defined, and surveys, interviews, and state assessments are used to collect a wide range of data (E36 and E37). Internal validity and participant attrition is addressed (E37), and a large sample size is expected (E38). Fidelity of implementation measures and thresholds are clearly articulated (E40).

Weaknesses:

As stated in the project evaluation, the project's impact on other underserved populations may not be easily generalized (E41). The project evaluation does not fully describe how the pilot participants will be chosen and their characteristics (E41).

Reader's Score: 17

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 project evaluation will use a pilot study of teachers and students to answer well-defined research questions and provide feedback and refinement (E41). There will be performance feedback and assessment at the mid-point of each cohort (E42). Details regarding the reporting of findings are clearly stated (E130 and E131).

Weaknesses:

The project does not plainly state the characteristics of the pilot teachers and students and how they will be chosen, which could impact the reliability of the project relative to the treatment and comparison groups (E41).

Reader's Score: 4

Sub

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

Strengths:

The project evaluation articulates key components and their theorized outcomes on teachers and students (E42). A robust mediational impact model is described in detail (E136). Implementation thresholds, which include teacher participation, are clearly expressed (E43).

Weaknesses:

The project evaluation does not clearly define the thresholds for positive teacher efficacy (E43). Without defined thresholds, the statistical significance of the treatment cannot be determined.

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/29/2023 09:37 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/29/2023 06:25 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	23
Sub Total	30	23
Total	30	23

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Early-phase Tier II Panel - 1: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: American Institutes for Research (S411C230090)

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: 23

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:

For the impact evaluation beginning in 2026-27, the applicant proposes to conduct a randomized control trial evaluation study with half of the schools within each district assigned to the treatment group and half to the control group, with the expectation of having 22 schools in each group. (e37) If well conducted, this has the potential to meet WWC standards without reservations. Although the applicant expects the school level attrition to be minimal, it offers a sufficient justification for how the study can still meet WWC standards even if up to 50% of schools in each group drop out of the study. (e37-38) As an incentive for control schools to remain in the study for the entire 2-year period, they will be offered the program for free after the project completion. (e37) The applicant intends to test baseline equivalence on school and student level demographic characteristics and student reading achievement data prior to the intervention (e38), which will help ensure meeting WWC standards. A table on p. e36 includes 7 research questions to be addressed along with the measures to be used and a timeline for implementation. The proposed evaluators have the necessary experience and time commitment to conduct the evaluation.

Weaknesses:

AIR is both the applicant of record and will also conduct the evaluation. Although it is stated that the management structure allows for a firewall to be created between program and evaluation staff to protect the independence of the impact evaluation (e35), more detail is needed about how this will function, for example, management reporting structure, which is not made clear on the organizational chart on p. e129. Also, there is no discussion about a firewall for the evaluation of the pilot study. In addition, more information is needed about the implementation of the pilot study, such as selection process for the 20 teachers (10 per year) to ensure that results that inform the impact study are not biased, as no discussion indicates that the pilot study is designed to meet WWC standards.

Reader's Score: 15

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:

Prior to the impact evaluation, the evaluator will conduct a 2-year pilot study to inform decisions about revisions to the curriculum and coaching supports. (e41) The applicant provides a detailed chart for continuous meeting frequency, participants to attend, and feedback data sources on p. e 130. Project dissemination strategies include publications, websites, district outreach, and conferences, all described in detail on p. e128.

Weaknesses:

Although the applicant will obtain extensive teacher feedback through surveys (e10, e130), no plan or timeline was discussed to provide feedback to participating schools and districts and solicit their input, for example, what might be the impact on the schools and districts of having their teachers participate in the program.

Reader's Score: 4

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

Strengths:

The applicant identifies the two key program components as teacher supports and the instructional model. Each has several sub-components as stated on p. e42. Four acceptable implementation thresholds that specify percentage completion rates for activity completion have been identified for the teacher support component. (e43) To assess core component implementation fidelity, preliminary thresholds have been identified as low (<60%), moderate (60% -80%), and high (>80%) for the percentage who participate in all core components. These are research-based thresholds as discussed by the applicant. (e40) The mediational impact analysis is described in detail on pp. e135-138. The intent is to determine whether teachers' knowledge, self-efficacy, and use of the instructional materials mediates three key student outcomes to include reading comprehension, critical thinking, and self-efficacy. Appropriate measures and instruments have been identified on p. e36.

Weaknesses:

The applicant provides no measurable goals to indicate whether the student outcomes have been achieved. Data to assess reading comprehension, critical thinking, and self-efficacy will be collected (Research Questions 5 and 6 on p. e36), but there is no indication of what constitutes a successful outcome for the treatment group in comparison to the control group.

Reader's Score: 4

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