

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/24/2015 08:46 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	0
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	18
Sub Total	100	18
Total	100	18

Technical Review Form

Panel #10 - i3 Development Panel - 10: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(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.

(2) The national significance of the proposed project.

(3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

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

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

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

(3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

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

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) 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 Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

The project evaluation plan appears promising for producing strong evidence to support project implementation and effectiveness for the following reasons: The applicant identifies and provides details on how they will use a mixed-method single randomized control trial research design (p. 13) that would meet What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards without reservations. The large sample of proposed schools will be randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups, thus avoiding bias. The key evaluation research questions on (p. 21) are clear and achievable. The sampling and power analysis are thoroughly described on (p. 37) for a sample of 1500 students across 6 schools. The minimum detectable effect size of .25 on (p. 25) at power of .80 at alpha .05 using a random effects model was proposed. The methods appear to be appropriate for the key evaluation questions posed. The applicant includes a rich description and justification for the use of a large sample of 125 students randomly assigned to each school. Additional key components of the evaluation such as reporting and dissemination of evaluation results are fully explained on page 9. The budget for the evaluation also appears adequate for the proposed work involved. The experience and well published track record of the external evaluation group is also promising.

Weaknesses:

The applicants include a full description of specific and measurable project goals and objectives; however, they do not align with the primary and exploratory evaluation research questions outlined on (p. 21). There is also a lack of detail provided on the qualitative survey instruments to be used for data collection and the comparison sample group of participants.

Reader's Score: 18

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	0
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	18
Sub Total	100	18
Total	100	18

Technical Review Form

Panel #10 - i3 Development Panel - 10: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(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.

(2) The national significance of the proposed project.

(3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

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

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

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

(3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

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

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) 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 Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

The proposed intervention program is Peer Group Connection (PGC) whose goals are to increase non-cognitive abilities, student engagement, and improve academic achievement (decreased dropout rates, on-time promotion rates to next grade level, and 4-year cohort graduation rates)- pg. e13. The proposed evaluation design is a RCT at the student level (9th grade students in six schools) intended to meet the WWC evidence standards without reservations (pg.22). The proposed evaluation will assess the impact of the program on students' non-cognitive abilities, student engagement, and educational outcomes. An implementation evaluation is also proposed to inform the implementation process and identify features and conditions necessary for sustainability and replication. The evaluation plan is well conceptualized. The proposed research method (RCT) is appropriate for the research questions posed (pg.21). A comprehensive logic model is also provided (pg.11).

The proposed evaluation if implemented appropriately will meet WWC standards without reservations. The applicant has effectively addressed many of the issues critical to a RCT design for example;

- The target population, sample size, and sample characteristics are well described
- Sample size is estimated using power analysis and the minimum detectable effect size (MDES= .25 as a benchmark) based on the evaluation design is provided (pg.22).
- A good description of the randomization process and how the intervention and comparison groups will be formed. In this case, students were randomly assigned to the treatment or the control condition (pg. 22-23).
- The intervention and comparison conditions are described (pg. 23).
- A good description of outcome measures and data sources is provided to help assess their face validity (pg. 23).
- The applicants display an awareness of attrition and spillover effects, and include a sensible albeit brief plan for addressing them (pg. 24).
- General information on data analysis methods (i.e. multi-level model) is provided for the evaluation questions and type of data to be collected though more rigorous methods such as HLM that take into account nesting of data within clusters would be more appropriate (pg.24). Information on qualitative data analysis is also provided (pg. 25).

The cost of the evaluation is included in the budget. PRG - a very qualified organization in education research and program evaluation is proposed for the evaluation (pg. 25). The resumes of key evaluation personnel with appropriate qualifications are included in the appendix ([REDACTED])- pg.25, pg. e94, pg. e97, and pg. e99. Use of an external evaluator can enhance the validity of findings.

Weaknesses:

- Overall and differential attrition and incidences of missing data are a constant threat to experimental designs and more so for special or at risk populations such as this one. The applicant did not provide enough details to address these threats in the analysis plan.
- The issue of maintaining baseline equivalence of groups for the analytic sample especially when faced with the threat of

overall, differential attrition, and joiners as might be the case here was not addressed. This information is necessary to strengthen the evaluation.

Reader's Score: 18

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	35
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	43
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	0
Sub Total	100	78
Total	100	78

Technical Review Form

Panel #10 - i3 Development Panel - 10: 84.411C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(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.

(2) The national significance of the proposed project.

(3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

Strengths:

The applicant has adequately described the national significance of their proposed project. They have described the national disparities among students as they transition to high school and have listed such issues as increased absenteeism, truancy and school detachment. They have proposed a school-based, high school transition and cross-age peer mentoring program for 9th grade students designed to improve non-cognitive abilities and enhance student engagement to support these outcomes. (16, 20)

The applicant has provided adequate descriptions of the effects of their PGC program for 9th grade students. Their peer tutoring, coaching and non-cognitive development initiatives that have improved graduation rates are noted and supported by statistical evidence. (20-21). The applicant's proposal will increase the opportunity for successful implementation in new markets, as their strategy will include existing PGC schools that will provide advisor and coaching activities. These activities will aid new PGC schools in developing and executing their programs (20-21).

The applicant's strategy has a high potential for replicability as they have an established history of implementation in over 200 schools, and will build upon existing strategies like maintaining a one-time initial fee for training, curriculum and technical assistance and convenient access to school resources (24). They have a robust approach for selecting advisors and their training and outreach activities among students and teachers will develop skills necessary to enhance their existing program as well as broaden opportunities for replicability as new support systems and networks are formed (28-30).

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 35

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

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

(1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly

specified and measurable.

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

(3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

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

Strengths:

The applicant has listed their 4 goals along with corresponding objectives that are detailed, target specific areas of improvement, quantifiable and have the ability to provide measurements of progress. Their objectives involve relevant stakeholders and staff and include detailed plans focused on improving academic, engagement and graduation rates. (24-25)

The applicant has identified each key staff position, including those responsible for direct project oversight, management and implementation, such as their PD. They have included job descriptions, resumes and time commitments that demonstrate capacity and experience to adequately develop oversee and manage their proposed program. (31-32, 76-101)

The applicant has included a description of project timelines and milestones for the full project period and includes approximate dates for implementation of all components of the project. The description is clear, thorough, follows a logical sequence and includes all implementation, evaluation and dissemination activities (32-34).

The applicant has detailed adequate procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement. They have a comprehensive plan that includes relevant stakeholders who will directly be involved in feedback initiatives and ensure program goals are met, methods of feedback and tools used, such as formative surveys that will provide quick information regarding the receptiveness of students, intervals for remediation and assessments of both quantitative and qualitative data (34-35).

The applicant will broadly disseminate information through various channels that include peer-reviewed journals, presenting at various regional and national conferences, and sharing results with stakeholders and prospective school partners. These various methods will increase their networking potential, peak interest and chances of further replication (35).

Weaknesses:

The applicant has not distinctly linked appropriate inputs and activities with their objectives. This would show what specific resources and activities will be needed to accomplish each objective. (26)

Reader's Score: 43

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the

appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) 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 Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Reader #4: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	31
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	42
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	0
Sub Total	100	73
Total	100	73

Technical Review Form

Panel #10 - i3 Development Panel - 10: 84.411C

Reader #4: *****

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(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.

(2) The national significance of the proposed project.

(3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

Strengths:

The applicant proposes to build upon Peer Group Connections (PGC), already in rural North Carolina communities, while incorporating those schools currently implementing these programs into an advisory role. The applicant also seeks to add a service learning component to the existing program. (pg. 4).

The applicant cites the growing body of evidence of the impact of student disengagement and the corresponding effect on graduation rates (pg.5), in particular the disproportionate effect on high-needs students. The applicant demonstrates the national significance by citing pertinent references of student disengagement, 9th grade failure rate, and the lack of appropriate mentors.

PCG has been implemented in over 200 schools in 13 states demonstrating some ability to be replicated in a variety of settings. (pg. 9). This large number of schools in a variety of settings validates the applicant assertion of replicability.

Weaknesses:

While the applicant references a 4 year longitudinal study as evidence of promise (pg. 5), this study is limited to the impact of Peer Groups on the graduation of Hispanic males. It is unclear if any evidence exists to the broader impact of this proposal.

The applicant notes (pg. 9) that this proposal is replicable due to the use of in-community resources and one-time initial costs; however, it is unclear how communities that do not have this initial infusion of cash would be able to replicate this proposal and how these communities would afford additional training due to attrition and turnover.

Reader's Score: 31

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan**1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

- (1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the project are clearly specified and measurable.**
- (2) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.**
- (3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.**
- (4) The mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information on its project so as to support further development or replication.**

Strengths:

The applicant provides 4 specific goals (pg. 9), aligned objectives, and outcome measures. The inclusion of a "potential risks" chart (pg. 10, Table 5) demonstrates a thorough approach to the development of a well-developed project design.

The applicant provides an extensive description of clearly defined roles and responsibilities (pg. 17), a comprehensive timeline with milestones (pg. 18) including due dates and responsible parties and thus ensures the applicants' completion of the proposed project on time and within budget.

In table 9 (pg. 19), the applicant describes robust measures to ensure continuous feedback including regular observations, student and faculty feedback forms, fidelity logs, and focus groups. Monthly project Team meetings will review goals and progress and "problem solve" identified challenges.

The applicant proposes an extensive plan to disseminate information including peer reviewed journal submissions, presentations at national conferences, and hosted webinars. (pg. 20).

Weaknesses:

While the applicant does provide an extensive description of project goals and objectives, the applicant lacks specific measurables in their outcome proposals (pg. 11). The inclusion of target data would strengthen this portion of the application. For example, instead of "Increased on-time high school graduation rates" a stronger outcome might be " to increase on-time high school graduation rates by 1% overall annually during the course of the grant with a 2% increase of graduation rates for high-needs students."

Reader's Score: 42

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) 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 Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

Not Scored

Weaknesses:

Not Scored

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Reader #5: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	35
Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan		
1. Project Design/Mgmt. Plan	45	43
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	20	0
Sub Total	100	78
Total	100	78

Technical Review Form

Panel #10 - i3 Development Panel - 10: 84.411C

Reader #5: *****

Applicant: Center for Supportive Schools (U411C150048)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(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.

(2) The national significance of the proposed project.

(3) The potential replicability of the proposed project or strategies, including, as appropriate, the potential for implementation in a variety of settings.

Strengths:

PGC seeks to build upon the results from a single randomized control trial that show improved educational outcomes for low-income students. The project will serve high-need freshmen in six low-income rural North Carolina high schools. CSS, the lead agency, will partner with The Policy & Research Group (PRG) to conduct an experimental study to measure program impacts on non-cognitive abilities and student engagement, such as perceptions of peer support for working hard and doing well in school and examine the extent to which these impacts translate into increased on-time promotion rates, decreased dropout rates, and higher 4-year cohort graduation rates. (p. e13)

The PGC proposed project strives to enhance high-quality program by tapping into schools that are already implementing PGC with fidelity in high-need, rural NC communities to become advisors and coaches to the new PGC schools proposed for this project, providing important support as new schools begin to implement the program. This proposed project represents the first time PGC will be implemented with a codified school peer support system in place. This also represents the first time PGC will be implemented with service learning as an essential program component. As a result of these innovative techniques, the PGC proposed project will seek to couple an evidenced program with promising new strategies for improving schools' capacity for implementation and deeper student-learning. (p. e19)

This project is significant and innovative for the following reasons:

(a) It capitalizes on existing resources such as staff, students, and time in the school day. Existing school faculty staff will be trained as opposed to requiring non-school or additional school staff;

(b) It taps into older students, an underutilized resource, as peer leaders who support younger students;

(c) It ensures peer leaders receive rigorous training through a credit-bearing daily leadership course;

(d) It is integrated into the school day, increasing the likelihood that it becomes institutionalized over time;

(e) It is a universal intervention designed to enhance non-cognitive skills among all students through a systems-wide approach;

(f) The intensity and duration of PGC activities are especially robust. Peer leaders are trained in a daily leadership development class (ex. 45 minutes five times per week) and contact with younger students includes weekly, 45 minute mentoring sessions, all as part of their regular school schedule. Peer leaders meet with the same groups of freshman throughout their 9th grade year.

(p. e19)

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score: 35

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Design and Management Plan

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

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

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

(3) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

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

Strengths:

The project design and management plan for the proposed project is detailed and specific, providing program goals and corresponding objectives.(p. e24-25)

A chart of the project's partners and their key roles is included in the grant. (Appendix J-1, p. e132)

A chart describing Project Personnel & Organizational Structure has been included in grant application to indicate the organizational structure of the proposal. Appendix J-2. (p. e133)

A detailed chart with specific responsibilities of the project's key personnel, project team, workgroups and site-based stakeholder teams is provided in the proposal on p. 32.

A chart which displays the project's milestones and timelines with benchmarks of specific dates and project tasks completions have been included. This chart will allow for oversight management and program implementation progress (p. e33)

Budget narrative is comprehensive and documents project adherence to the grant requirements. (p. e.199-212)

Strategies that will be utilized to ensure active communication, accountability, and continuous improvement include the following:

- a) Monthly meetings of project teams and site-based stakeholder teams;
- b) Advisor team check-ins, observations & fidelity monitoring conducted every other week;
- c) District and school leadership check ins conducted quarterly
- d) Ongoing implementation and feedback and;
- e) Annual advisor summit.

(p. e34-35)

Mechanisms to be utilized in information dissemination include; publication of peer-reviewed manuscripts (American Journal of Education, Educational Researcher, ENGAGE and The Journal of Educational Research) about the proposed project.

Presentations at regional and national conferences (American Educational Research Association, Institute of Education

Sciences, National Mentoring Summit, and Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness). A report of lessons learned and evaluation results will be provided to stakeholders and prospective school partners at each of the participating LEA/school and information sessions and webinars will be held. Final study results will be disseminated through popular media as a means of providing program impacts to parents and the public. Research results will also be posted on the CSS website and sent to the more than 8,000 national education stakeholders who receive the CSS e-newsletter. (p. e35)

Weaknesses:

The logic model included by the applicant does not adequately connect program activities with program outcome (p. e 26)

Reader's Score: 43

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

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

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) 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 Evidence Standards with reservations.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project plan includes sufficient resources to carry out the project evaluation effectively.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/25/2015 07:20 AM